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JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

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William Cameron Forbes

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NEW YORK
THE BAKER & TAYLOR COMPANY
PUBLISHERS



OPEN HOUSE

BY

JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

Author of "Dr. Ellen"



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I

STORIES are usually told from the standpoint of some one person; you are shown the events as the hero saw them, or the maiden aunt, or the god from the car. The greater part of this story has to be told from the standpoint of the great central living-room of Dr. Caspar Diman's vast, old-fashioned mansion, for it was there that nearly everything happened. The house with its three acres of sweet, untidy garden had come to him through his wife — her one appreciable contribution to his life, unless a measure of his growth in the way of patience, forbearance and loving-kindness be put down to the credit of the shallow, peevish spirit that called them forth. She might have made a saint of him in time, but, fortunately, she had been taken away after three years, leaving her husband still possessed of a few energetic failings, such as a somewhat arbitrary fashion of making decisions, and a suicidal carelessness about money.

The house, built in the mansard roof and black walnut period, showed few marks of that reign

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of banality except for the vastness of its rooms; any one of these might have comfortably enclosed an ordinary modern cottage, while the central living-room could have swallowed a boarding-house with ease. At a time when all fashionable front doors opened on a strip of hall with folding doors leading right and left into square parlours, someone had conceived a front door opening widely from the garden into a great oblong apartment—the hall and the two parlours in one. Entering, one faced the massive stairway that rose in a dignified curve against the opposite wall, leaving room at one end for a door leading to the passage connecting dining-room and kitchen, and at the other for glass doors opening on the verandah. Patients came in this way, and sat uneasily on the benches placed just inside, trying to seem unconscious of one another and folding their lips into lines of awkward solemnity when their sidelong glances met. A fireplace and bookcases occupied the right-hand wall, while the left, an amazing distance away, was largely taken up by folding doors that opened into the doctor's office. The inlaid floor, made of the narrowest possible boards, alternately light and dark, had pushed up here and there into tiny hillocks with age, and the plumpness of the leather cushions and chairs was slowly oozing away

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through their broken corners; yet it was a pleasant and even a distinguished shabbiness that pervaded, a shabbiness that could dignify various tight bouquets of mingled geraniums and nasturtiums that must have set the teeth on edge in a smaller atmosphere, and lend a sort of grandmotherly grace to the vast hangings of dull maroon rep, that still showed a line of crimson under the fringe.

Streaming sunlight gave an air of peace and serenity that Dr. Diman's entrance from his office did not dispel. He had five engagements to keep in the next two hours, but no one would have supposed that he had anything more important on hand than the fastening in his buttonhole of a small red rose from the trellis by the window. Years before, in the brief period when he had worn a flower because his wife picked it for him, a very sick woman had said:

"Your rose always makes me feel that, after all, there is some hope and comfort and pleasantness in the world. It does me good every time you come."

He had remembered it, as he remembered everything, little or big, that had human significance, and ever after, in season and out, had managed to wear the small emblem of cheerfulness on his coat. It was usually a carelessly shabby coat.

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Dr. Diman was not yet forty, and the vigour of youth still straightened his shoulders and emphasized his step; but it was ten years since he had begun to forget that trousers should be creased and boots kept on boot-trees, that eye-glasses have more distinction than spectacles, and that a hat which has met the storms of three winters may lack something to the critical eye. Yet his shabbiness was, like that of his house, touched with distinction. People were fond of telling him that he looked like General Grant, a fact that interested him not at all, though his short brown beard might have seemed intended to emphasize the resemblance. He was curiously lacking in the typical marks of his years. Side by side with the grown man could still be seen the honest, affectionate little boy from whom he had started, while already, on the other side, was foreshadowed the wise and benignant old man in whom he should end; and these two presences seemed sometimes to meet in him, blurring his right to any momentary position on the scale that runs up to threescore and ten, and putting him on a level with all ages. There were people — as a rule, not well known to him personally — who called him a crank. It is only fair to add that his sister Myrtle, who had kept his house ever since his wife's death, eleven years before, took the same view.

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She came in as he was settling his rose, headed anxiously for the kitchen. Miss Myrtle's house-keeping expression was ever that of one who has just heard a distant crash of china, or who smells something burning. She moved as hurriedly as her weight permitted, but it could be seen that her soul went ahead, and was already at the kitchen door with some life and death message for the ice man or the grocer.

"Oh, Myrtle!" Her brother accosted her casually, though a half smile lurked behind his spectacles. "We are not using the big southeast bed-room, are we?"

She stopped as though struck, and the dropping of her stout arms at her sides showed that no casual tone could hoodwink *her*.

"Caspar! *Is* it another nervous prostrate?" she cried.

"No." He was obviously a little sorry, but not at all afraid of her.

"An inebriate or a morphine fiend?"

"Neither."

"*Not* St. Vitus's dance again?" Her tone intimated that, if it were, she should simply die, and he took pity on her.

"No: this time it is a handsome and entirely healthy young woman."

She knew him too well to accept comfort. "It

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is another case, just the same — you needn't tell me! Why you have to bring home every stray cat and lame dog you come across —! What is she, anyway?"

He looked at his watch. "I haven't time to tell you, now. She will act as my office assistant and take charge of the telephone — that will be a relief to you, won't it?" His tone encouraged a glimmer of cheer, but she only sighed. "She will be here late this afternoon, and her name is Cassandra Joyce," he added as he went out.

Cassandra Joyce! Miss Myrtle needed no more telling. That was, of course, the cousin who had come from Paris to live with Miss Emily Joyce, a week before her sudden death. Caspar, who had been called in consultation, had spoken pityingly of the girl at the time — his sister might have foreseen what was coming! Cassandra Joyce, daughter of a multi-millionaire whose fortunes had fallen with a reverberating crash three years ago, and who had taken a short cut out of difficulty and disgrace with a bullet; a girl brought up to every luxury and, no doubt, straight from the home of some rich friend, coming here to go through the farce of earning her living — this was a little too much. Her important errand to the kitchen forgotten, Miss Myrtle still sat where she had dropped, gloomily facing the situation.

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It was never a simple situation for the house-keeper in the spreading, old-fashioned mansion which Dr. Diman called his home, but which in his sister's opinion might more fittingly be called a combination of Rescue League, Snug Harbour, Sanatorium, and Sheltering Arms. She had kept house for him eleven years, and every year, in her phraseology, "he got worse." She could not accept him as incurable, and the average man must have grown propitiatory or irritable after eleven years of her poignant dismay; but Caspar smiled at her protests, offered up no argument, and went his chosen way without so much as an extra crease in his forehead on her account. At this moment a superannuated French chef, who had kept his pathetically charming manners, but lost large tracts of his memory, was presiding in the kitchen with the exquisite humility of a fallen monarch; and what comfort was it to know that the purée might be perfect, when one knew also that it might come in with its main ingredient forgotten? Though a teacher has had remarkable success with children, it does not necessarily follow that, after a physical breakdown, she is entirely successful in light housework; even now the trail of Ann Blossom's willing but vague duster could be seen in a broad sweep across the grey film on the centre table. A professor of botany,

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whose eyes need a year's rest, may have a minute knowledge of a garden's needs, but does that keep him from leaving the hose running all night or dropping cakes of loam from his heels every time he enters the house? Add to this hybrid domestic staff a wealthy forlornity who thought she paid for what she was getting, and the prospect of a helpless spoiled girl to be looked after —

"Well, if it wasn't for Hattie, I'd give up," concluded Miss Myrtle heavily. Hattie was belligerently able-bodied and she came for wages, nothing else. "Deliver me from gratitude service!" was the final sum of the housekeeper's experience.

There was great excitement in the household when it was known that the daughter of Sidney L. Joyce was coming there as a paid assistant. Ann Blossom, hearing of it from Hattie, set down her dustpan at the head of the stairs (where its contents were presently blown in four directions by the breeze from Miss Myrtle's skirt) and flew down to tell Ernest Cunningham, who was tacking up a clematis vine outside one of the living-room windows. He took off his black glasses, as he usually did when Ann came running with news, and dropped down on the top of the ladder with an air of tranquil satisfaction. Ernest never knew who anyone was, and had to be told the story of

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Sidney L. Joyce's wealth and downfall — as set forth in Hattie's version — before he could fully savour the news. Ann, with her palms on the window-ledge, balanced on her stiffened arms, her head thrust out between the vines. She had a thin, sweet face, with wide, unworldly grey eyes that might have been those of a martyr for a high cause if they had not always shone so innocently with happiness. There was some indefinable similarity between her and the long, pale, brown-haired young man watching her so contentedly from the ladder. One felt that they belonged to the same phase of spiritual sensitiveness and worldly inexperience.

"Just think, a millionaire's daughter earning her own bread and butter," Ann marvelled. "Isn't it romantic?"

"Now, just what do you mean by romantic?" And Ernest clasped his fingers about one thin knee with an air of settling down to solid enjoyment. Ann refused the challenge with a little backward shake of her head, as though she literally tossed it off.

"Don't — I won't!" she laughed. "It *is* romantic, and you know it. Think of having lived like a princess till you were grown up, and then all at once becoming Cinderella!"

"Exceedingly hard lines, I should say."

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"Oh, it is, it is! I am so sorry — but one can't help being interested, too, can one?" The fear that she had seemed heartless strained her face until she saw that he was smiling at her.

"You needn't explain, Ann Blossom. I understand," he said, cutting one of the doctor's little red roses and laying it on the window-ledge beside her hand. "We must do what we can to make it easier for your Cinderella. Is she good looking?"

"Oh, of course; beautiful. She would have to be. Wouldn't it be lovely if some charming rich man came here to be treated, and he fell in love with her!" Ann's eyes were shining at the prospect. Ernest passed a thoughtful hand over his smooth brown hair.

"I don't suppose a professor of botany's salary would quite do," he suggested. Her transparent face showed a momentary blankness; then she laughed, rather breathlessly.

"Why, it might," she said cheerfully, turning away. "Yes, I don't see why not. Now, I must go and finish my work."

"You are forgetting your rose," he called after her through the window. She was at the foot of the stairs and she did not turn back.

"Oh, I haven't time for roses now," she said lightly. He leaned in, his elbows on the sill.

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"Ann Blossom, please come and get your rose," he begged humbly, holding it out. She just glanced back over her shoulder.

"Keep it for Cinderella," she said, and ran up-stairs; but her face was bright again. The emptied state of her dustpan puzzled her until she looked at the surrounding floor. Then she laughed.

"You are a bad little dustpan, not to take better care of your dust," she said indulgently. "Ann won't trust you another time." And she blithely fell to sweeping again.

Even in the kitchen the news of Miss Joyce's coming produced a sensation. When Dr. Diman, returning at noon, dropped down in the living-room to look over his letters, a lean and stooping figure in a chef's white coat and cap, gleamingly fresh for the occasion, appeared in the doorway, one hand crushing the other against his bowed chest in the extremities of apology as a faint cough craved attention. The doctor's smile was affectionate.

"Come in, Ronsard. What is it?"

Ronsard's cap was lifted from his dignified white locks. "If monsieur le docteur will permit me, I come to make a request."

"Fire ahead!"

"I thank you. I am told that a young lady comes to the house to stay — Mlle. Joyce. It is

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a great event to me, monsieur. I was chef in her father's house for five years. Ah, he was a very grand gentleman! 'Ronsard,' he would say to me, 'there is not a chef in New York who can cook a bird as you can!' I do not know why he should think that;" Ronsard smiled deprecation, a bony brown hand curved modestly over his white moustaches; "I merely did as I knew how — my little talent was very humble. When the guests would say, 'Mr. Joyce, there is no cook like your Ronsard,' I had to think it was their kindness. I could not explain it otherwise."

Dr. Diman smiled encouragement, though vaguely, half his attention being drawn away by the letter in his hand. "Yes, indeed," he murmured.

"A very great sorrow befell me and I went away while mademoiselle was still a little girl, but she will not have forgotten Ronsard;" the old chef straightened as though he saluted his glorious past. "I come now to my request. Will monsieur le docteur permit that I serve the dinner with some slight additions in honour of Mlle. Joyce?"

"Why, of course: excellent idea! Do your best for her."

Ronsard bent his head with a noble sweep of the cap he held.

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"I thank monsieur!" Then, as Miss Myrtle's step sounded in the hall above, his grandiloquence abruptly collapsed, and he backed hurriedly into the doorway. "The materials will be but slight. If the docteur would perhaps say to mademoiselle his sister that he has given permission —?" he ventured softly.

"Yes, I will speak of it. It will be all right, Ronsard," the doctor promised. His eyes looked sorry, which was perhaps the most endearing of all their many warm expressions. They often carried that look when one of amusement might have been expected.

He told Myrtle at once, causing her to stop blankly on the stairs with dropping arms.

"Caspar, I think that is perfectly crazy, to start her off with a dinner party," she lamented. "The girl will think she is here simply as a guest."

"Oh, come off, Myrtle," was the good-humoured response.

"The question is, will she come off? Or will she stay up in the air while I do her work?" She came slowly down, a step at a time. "If you had to do the housekeeping for a week, Caspar, you would understand. What with Miss Snell bursting into tears whenever the toast comes in buttered, and dashing off to lie down between every course, and Ann Blossom forgetting to come to

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meals and losing everything she lays hands on, and Mr. Cunningham — ”

“I know, Myrtle. I fully appreciate it. And if you find that it is getting too much for your nerves — ”

The last word had a magical effect. Miss Myrtle stiffened and straightened: her plaintive voice took on an unexpected force.

“Nerves! I have asked you, Caspar, never to use that word in connection with me. I am a perfectly healthy woman, and I have no nerves.” She seemed to be addressing some unseen audience. “I can eat what is set before me, and I can sleep even if there is a wrinkle in my sheet, or a dog two miles off takes to barking. I don’t know what a nerve is.” And she passed on towards the garden with head indignantly erect. Her brother’s expression was covertly wicked as he returned to his letters.

At four o’clock three trunks arrived, and were taken up to the big southeast chamber at the head of the stairs. It was the most desirable bed-room in the house, and had been Dr. Diman’s until he had given it up to a case of incipient melancholia that he had brought home one autumn, five years before. The patient had gone away in the spring well, and Caspar had credited over half the victory to the sunlight that poured through the

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leafless chestnuts by day, and the evening blaze of logs on the generous hearth. So he had kept the room for his cases ever since, much to Miss Myrtle's disapproval. The three trunks made no more impression on it than so many footstools. At half past four they were followed by a box, obviously containing an offering of flowers. At five Miss Emily Joyce's carriage made what was perhaps its last trip of state, and the doctor threw back the door to Miss Cassandra Joyce.

Cinderella was beautiful, as Ann Blossom had declared she must be; more beautiful, perhaps, at first glance than at second or third, when one had had time to resist the imperious assurance of her bearing, collect one's scattered faculties and venture on an independent judgment. Yet perhaps it was scarcely worth while to be critical of a young woman who was so obviously indifferent to what others might be thinking. The good side of such indifference is practical efficiency, the bad side insolence: both qualities were to be discerned in the poise of Miss Joyce's head, her straight glance, and the rather too straight line of her lips.

She greeted her employer with the careless friendliness of a well-disposed sovereign, and, dropping into the largest chair, gave him a rapid commentary on the badness of American roads and the banality of American life. Caspar, who

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had no social fluency, stood silent and wholly at his ease, smiling down on her with the air of one who waits for inevitable preliminaries to be disposed of. His attitude presently had its effect, for, pulling off her long gloves, she spread her jewelled fingers to cool them and asked with a sigh of impatience:

"Now, what is it that I am supposed to do?"

He welcomed the topic by drawing up a chair. "Do you know what the duties of a doctor's assistant are?" he began.

"I do not."

"Well, then, neither do I, so we start even." She had to grant him a brief smile, his good-will was so genuine.

"You said something about a telephone," she reminded him.

"Yes, and that is important." He became business-like at once, seeing that she would prefer it. "If you will always answer it, and be careful about messages, you will make my sister's lot very much easier. And I need someone to be here at office hours; patients are nervous critters and a sensible woman could make things much easier for them. I have got one staying in the house here, — Miss Snell, a very complex case of neurasthenia." Warming to his subject, he quite forgot to watch his new assistant's face.

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"She needs bright, wholesome companionship more than anything else. You can be of great service —"

He was interrupted by a sudden gasp of laughter; Miss Joyce had dropped her face into her hands. Caspar's eyes softened to their very sorriest look. He rose and stood beside her, offering his human nearness for lack of any other comfort.

"I know; it must be mighty queer to you." His voice was as warm as his eyes. "I am glad you have the courage to laugh instead of cry."

"I beg your pardon." She lifted her head with a frown for his sympathy. "It is really rather novel, that is all. No one has ever expected me to be useful, you see."

"But these last three years?" he asked with hesitation, returning to his chair. "I understood that you were left —"

"With nothing whatever," was the prompt answer. "But I have been living with a friend in Paris, and she gave me everything."

His eyes fell. "Was that wholly — satisfactory?" he asked.

"What could I do? I have no near relatives. Louisa isn't anybody, socially, so it was worth her while to have me — she is very rich. I should have stayed with her indefinitely if she had not

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chosen to marry again — a most impossible little person. I could not stand that.”

“And so you came to America?”

“Unfortunately, yes. Cousin Emily Joyce had very reluctantly offered me a home, so I — even more reluctantly — accepted it. And the week after I arrived, she died — which was exactly like Cousin Emily. If it had not been for you — well, really, I don’t just know what I should be doing now.” She studied him with imperious curiosity. “Do you tow home all the derelicts you come across? For you can’t really suppose that I am of any practical use, can you?”

“I think that you can learn to be,” was the emphatic answer. “And I think helping you to learn that quite as important as curing you of a bodily disease would be. Besides, I do very much need someone with a head who can answer letters for me and write up case records from my notes. Oh, you will earn your salary, I assure you.”

“My salary!” she repeated with a short laugh. “Thirty dollars a month — I don’t believe I ever had a hat that cost less than thirty dollars. However —”

Hattie’s voice interrupted from the doorway, where she had planted herself with unembarrassed singleness of purpose.

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"That Frenchman's lost the salt pork," she announced baldly. "He had it, and now 'tis gone. Will he go out for some more, he says."

Dr. Diman looked puzzled. "Hadn't you better see my sister about it?" he suggested.

"Ah, no! Ah, monsieur, a thousand pardons!" Ronsard came fluttering down the passage, his arms extended in despairing apology. "It was but mislaid for a moment — I have found it. Monsieur should not have to hear of such things. I am an old man — I forget. I beg —"

"Ronsard!" Miss Joyce had started from her chair. "Surely it is Ronsard, our Ronsard!" she exclaimed, going rapidly towards him with extended hands, her face amazingly lighted.

"Ah, mademoiselle!" He bent until his white locks nearly touched the hands resting so warmly on his. "I said in my vanity, 'Mademoiselle will not have forgotten old Ronsard.' And see, it is true!" There were tears in his eyes.

"You are here, living here?" she said gladly, and Caspar saw for the first time that she was beautiful: he had thought her merely handsome, before. He watched her intently as she questioned the old man in animated French and told him frankly of herself.

"You must talk with me often, and I shall feel that I am not wholly alone in a strange

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place," she said finally, giving him her hands again.

"Ah, it is a great honour that mademoiselle still has room in her heart for old Ronsard, — even though she finds him in quest of the salt pork," he added with rueful humour.

Her laugh was quick and warm. "I am glad you found it," she said, returning to her chair. "That was a pleasant surprise," she added, looking at Caspar with more friendliness than she had yet shown.

"I am so glad! And I think there is another in your room. I saw what looked like a very gorgeous box of flowers carried up not long ago."

Her face clouded instantly: he had a sense of being abruptly shut out in the cold again.

"Oh, that," she said with a shrug that suggested distaste. "Now, is there anything else you wish to explain to me?"

"I think the rest can wait till morning."

"Very well;" she rose with weary determination. "I don't pretend that this is more than a temporary arrangement, but while I am here I will try to be what you want. Now, I should like to go to my room. Will you send a maid to unhook me?"

He looked a trifle bewildered. "We have no maids for unhooking, I am afraid. If it is any-

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thing Ann Blossom can do for you — she is a very dear girl who is living here for the present —”

“No; I am afraid she would fumble. I can’t bear to have untrained people touch me.” And Miss Joyce turned to the stairs. “I will manage some way.”

“Here is my sister: she will show you your room,” said Caspar relievedly as Miss Myrtle made a reluctant appearance. However Myrtle might protest beforehand, he could count on a dignified courtesy from her when the situation was irrevocable. When the door of the southeast chamber had closed on his new case, a few moments later, he stood staring after her with one hand clasping the back of his neck, his outer sign of perplexity.

“Well, she’s honest,” he mused with a faint sigh. Then her face, lighted with an old affection, rose before him. “Oh, she’ll learn, poor girl, she’ll learn!” He turned to his office, but paused absently with his fingers on the knob. “If only it were something simple, like tuberculous meningitis!” he murmured. Then, hearing a trailing step on the verandah, he slipped through the door and closed it noiselessly after him.

The glass doors opened and a thin, middle-aged woman came slowly in, her arms filled with

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a varied collection of comforts, including a cushion, a shawl, a parasol, two books, a cologne bottle, a thermometer, and a hot-water bag; it being part of the doctor's system that Miss Snell should wait on herself. Her face might have been taken for a sallow mask of melancholy, set incongruously between an old-fashioned patch of little sandy curls above, and a spreading bow of bright plaid ribbon below. Even as she languidly backed against the door to close it, Ann Blossom came running in by another way with her shining face of news.

"Oh, Miss Snell, did you see her?" she whispered eagerly.

Miss Snell paused and looked patiently at the girl over her load. "And just whom do you mean by 'her,' Miss Blossom?"

Ann was a little abashed. "Oh, I thought you would remember; we were all talking about her after breakfast," she explained. Miss Snell permitted herself to understand.

"I suppose you mean Miss Joyce. She passed me as she came in, but I did not notice her especially."

"Oh, she's lovely, Miss Snell!" Ann's enthusiasm could not long be kept down. "Perfectly beautiful! And she didn't look poor at all. There was stunning lace on her coat and —"

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"Irish lace is very common," interrupted Miss Snell.

"But it is pretty," Ann ventured. "And such a strange hat — it was probably very Parisian! Do you suppose that fluffy thing on the side was a bird of paradise? I've read of them."

Miss Snell shifted her load and turned towards the stairs. "My dear Miss Blossom," she protested, "the doctor's assistant's hats are a little out of my range of vision. She may wear whatever she pleases so long as she makes the house run a little more smoothly. My hot water this morning tasted of the kettle, and the — oh, dear, I must lie down!" She dropped her load into the nearest chair and made an abrupt dive for the couch, where she arranged herself perfectly flat. "And the toast was sent in buttered," she concluded in righteous protest. "It is time now for my third hot water, but I don't suppose anyone will remember it."

"I will get it, Miss Snell," Ann was beginning when Miss Myrtle appeared with a cup on a small tray, which she silently placed on a table beside Miss Snell.

"I hope this does not taste of the kettle," the latter said, sniffing anxiously at the cup. Miss Myrtle gave her a look of resigned contempt and went heavily out without answering. Miss Snell,

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who was quite impervious to silent looks, because she never saw them, tasted critically from the extreme edge of the spoon. "It does taste," she worried. "Not kettle this time — no, and it isn't smoke." She tasted again and again, with growing distress. "It isn't — onions — it's — it's — gas! It tastes of gas! Now, isn't that outrageous? I do think — I might have — hot water that didn't taste of — gas! It isn't — much — to ask!" And she burst into nervous tears, while Ann Blossom stood by in helpless dismay, timidly patting the couch.

The door at the head of the stairs opened and Cassandra Joyce, fresh and elaborate in embroidered linen, with white shoes and white silk stockings and a spreading lavender orchid pinned on her blouse, swept down the stairs. At sight of the quivering figure on the couch she stopped, startled.

"Is something the matter?" she asked.

"Miss Snell is a little upset," explained Ann Blossom compassionately. "She will be better in a —"

Miss Snell rose on one elbow, holding out a shaking hand towards the cup. "I wish someone to taste that hot water and see if it is fit to drink!" she cried. "I want witnesses: I want —"

"But, my dear lady," Miss Joyce interposed,

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"hot water is never fit to drink. If you must take it, why don't you add a little Scotch?"

The speech seemed to shock Miss Snell into composure. She slowly drew herself up and put her feet to the floor.

"You can know very little about nervous invalids, Miss Joyce," she said coldly, while Ann Blossom, looking frightened, took the cup and disappeared in search of a fresh brew.

"Oh, I don't know," Cassandra shrugged. "I have just spent a week with one."

"You did not continue with her, I notice." That shot did Miss Snell so much good that a wise person would have let her enjoy it; but Cassandra Joyce was very far from wise.

"Well, no. She died," was the placid answer. Miss Snell rose.

"You were fortunate to get another situation so quickly," she said, with the blandness of a nervous woman who has declared war to the knife. "I confess I hope that you have had more than one week of experience in filling a position?" The word "situation" did have its effect: Cassandra's eyes widened over a silent gasp. Then she laughed, without venom, but nevertheless wickedly.

"Oh, yes," she said, rather stimulated by the fact that a pleasant looking young man had come

in from the garden and was hesitating deferentially to obtrude himself. "On the boat coming over I acted as companion to a person who was crossing alone. It was a most satisfactory arrangement — it quite paid for the trip. I have testimonials to prove what a success I was." And her hand touched, lightly and contemptuously, the lavender orchid on her blouse.

"I could never understand why people hire companions," commented Miss Snell, beginning to gather up her belongings. "I suppose your employer was nervous at travelling alone."

"He did not seem to be," said Cassandra.

"He?" sharply. "Some invalid, I suppose?"

Cassandra picked up a magazine and looked interestedly at the frontispiece.

"Oh, no — perfectly well and strong," she said absently. Miss Snell stared, then turned and went up-stairs without a word. Cassandra slowly lifted her head, and met the pleasant brown eyes of Ernest Cunningham. After a faint pause, she allowed herself to smile. Ernest was laughing softly to himself as he bowed ceremoniously and passed up the stairs.

"He looks rather possible," she concluded.

The shrubbery was sending warm breaths of rose and honeysuckle through the open windows. Cassandra, left alone, seated herself on a window-

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ledge and looked from the shabby old room to the shabby old garden, wondering sadly at her lot. What was she doing here, she, Cassandra Joyce! Her head drooped under the dreariness of the answer. To Caspar, coming in from his office, she looked surprisingly, even pathetically young. Her youth had heretofore been rather obscured by the sweeping dominance, not to say aggressiveness, of her bearing, and this sudden vision of a bewildered and homesick girl was enlightening. She turned at his step, straightening defensively.

"Do you like your room?" he asked, seating himself in the adjoining window. She met his look of good-will with one of grave inquiry.

"Oh, yes," she answered absently. "I have been wondering about you," she added. "Are you a reformer?"

He laughed. "Why, I don't know: it has never occurred to me to ask. It is perfectly possible."

"But I always supposed a reformer was a very dreadful person."

"Well, I assure you, I am a very dreadful person, now and then."

Her smile was worth waiting for: it made another creature of her. "Oh, not the way I mean. I like you, you know." A princess could not have

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said it more simply, or with a more naïve betrayal that she conferred a favour. Caspar, accustomed to the honourable respect of colleagues and the somewhat doting devotion of patients, found her refreshing. His eyes were amused, yet he was not a little gratified.

"I am very glad," he answered quite as simply. "I hope you are going to like us all."

A faint shrug was her only answer to that. She had pulled a spray of roses towards her to smell it, and the action showed a red mark on the inside of her arm, just above the wrist.

"Why, you have hurt yourself, lately," he commented. She drew her sleeve down over the place.

"Oh, yes," she said indifferently. "Louisa's gown caught on fire a day or two before I left."

"And you put it out?"

"Well, she went into hysterics, and her future husband ran — for water, he said afterwards; so I naturally had to. She was annoyed with me later for having used her most valuable Persian rug, when there were cheaper ones at hand."

He gave an exclamation of impatience. "What a woman!"

"She was quite right," was the tolerant answer. "The other rugs were just as near: it simply proved that I had lost my head a little. I should

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remember another time. It is unforgivable to lose one's head, don't you think?"

"Unforgivable? Assuredly not. You speak with the insolence of perfect health, my dear young woman. Suppose your nerves were like so many crossed wires —"

"Indeed, I think there is a great deal of nonsense talked about nerves," she broke in with authority. "When I feel that way, I know it is nothing in the world but my bad temper. I could control it perfectly well if I had a big enough reason."

"What would you call a big enough reason?" he asked, abandoning his point with an indulgence that evidently reached her, for she gave a brief laugh at herself.

"I forgot that I was talking to a famous nerve specialist," she apologized. "That is just like me, you know — to set you right on your own subject." She was very attractive at that moment, leaning towards him, her face lit with an amused self-derision. "But, frankly, don't you think it is true — that women get behind their nerves as an excuse for their own hatefulness? You need never excuse me on the ground that I 'couldn't help it.' I always could."

"For 'a big enough reason,'" he reminded her. "I want to know what that would be."

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Her eyes fell away from his, and again he realized that she was, after all, only a girl, and tragically ill equipped for the struggle before her.

"Why, if I had enough to gain by it," she began slowly. He waited with surprising eagerness.

"Or —?" he prompted.

"Or — if I cared enough for anyone," she admitted. His quick smile enveloped her like sunshine.

"Ah, you will get on," he exclaimed irrelevantly. "I am so glad you came my way!"

She wondered at him silently for a moment. "I think you really must be a reformer," she concluded as Hattie appeared in the doorway, grasping a small dinner-bell in an uncompromising fist.

Not even Ronsard's charming additions to the dinner could quite fuse the varied elements of that strange household. Ann and Ernest were reduced to shy silence by the splendid stranger, while Miss Snell talked with pointed exclusiveness to Dr. Diman, as to the sole equal vouchsafed her. Miss Myrtle was too tensely expectant of a blunder in the cooking or the service to have any attention for unrelated topics: her anxious gaze hovered prayerfully over each dish cover, and her whispered cautions and directions to Hattie would have driven a less stolid soul insane.

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Hattie stumped on her appointed way without even a pretence of heeding, piled the plates after her own notions of convenience, and left the room when she considered that she had done enough.

"That girl!" sighed Miss Myrtle. "If she were not such a splendid worker —"

She was interrupted by a shriek from Miss Snell, a shriek that brought them all to their feet. She had started up, her skirts wrapped about her, her face agonized.

"There is a cat in the room!" she cried.

"Good Lord!" muttered Cassandra, sinking emphatically into her chair again. Miss Myrtle's face echoed the expression, but the others began looking under the tablecloth and the chairs with kindly concern.

"Where, Miss Snell? Did you see it come in?" Caspar asked.

"No-o-o. I feel it," she gasped. "Besides, I heard it meow." They searched the room with honest zeal, but no intruding cat was found. "I couldn't be mistaken," she persisted tearfully, still clinging to her skirts. Cassandra, who had risen perfunctorily and turned towards the window, lifted her hands to stifle a sudden cry of laughter. On the gravel path outside sat a tiny grey kitten, a smug, replete little kitten with its impertinent triangle of a face tilted up at the

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windows, as though in wonder at the commotion within; a wholly enchanting kitten to anyone not beset by antipathies. She made a sign to Ernest, who was investigating the curtains, and he, too, was shaken by silent laughter at the sight. He slipped quietly out of the room, and a moment later Miss Snell dried her eyes with a faint, reluctant, "It must have gone away again," and returned to her chair. Cassandra had seen Ernest pick up the little beast and rub his cheek against it as he carried it away, and their eyes met with amused understanding when he returned. He certainly was rather possible, this pleasant-looking young man. She was sorry that after dinner he announced an engagement and hurried off.

Miss Snell, exhausted by emotion, retreated to her room, and Ann Blossom followed to read to her. Dr. Diman was called out, and Miss Joyce, after lingering before the bookcases, absently glancing at the titles within, yawned and went up to bed.

"Oh, *quelle vie!*" she murmured.

At eleven o'clock Dr. Diman let himself in and sank into a deep chair, running a slow hand up from his forehead into the rough, iron-grey thicket above. His face, even at its tireddest, never expressed worry. "Well, now, what can we do about it?" was his characteristic phrase. If

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wisdom and experience answered, "Nothing," he instantly turned his inexhaustible energy elsewhere. To-night the lamplight showed him physically fagged and grave with some inner problem, yet fundamentally, as always, at peace with life. When the dropping back of his head lifted his gaze in the direction of the southeast chamber at the head of the stairs, a sudden smile, dubious, compassionate, yet wholly determined, warmed and lit his brown face. The reflection was still there when he tiptoed up the stairs a few minutes later.

A light had been left for him in the upper hall. He turned to put it out, but paused abruptly, his eyes on two slim shoes that had been confidently placed outside the door of the southeast chamber.

They were well-shaped shoes, beautifully made: beside his, as distinguished as a racing yacht beside a coal barge. The doctor laughed silently as he picked them up, contemplated the dust on their tips and started to carry them off to his own apartment. Then he hesitated, slowly shook his head and turned back. No parent ever disciplined a child more reluctantly than Dr. Diman replaced those slim shoes, undusted and unpolished, at his new assistant's threshold.

II

THE next day dawned in unseasonable and exhausting heat, a leaden heat that seemed to endow trivial objects with unexpected weight and that took the stiffening out of backbones as well as out of collars. Cassandra did not appear at the eight o'clock breakfast, but not long afterwards the following note from her was brought to Dr. Diman: —

I think I will not begin my duties to-day, it is so very warm. Will you kindly have a cup of coffee and some fruit sent up to me? I shall not want anything else.

C. J.

Caspar considered for at least sixty seconds, thoughtfully pinching his lower lip; then his eyes took on the amused determination with which they had regarded the boots the night before, and he wrote back: —

DEAR MISS JOYCE, —

It certainly is outrageously hot. I wish I could let you off, but I have some case records that I want written up to-day. I think you will find the hall cooler than your room. If you will be here at ten o'clock, I will show you how to do it. Ann Blossom will gladly carry you up some breakfast, I am sure.

Faithfully yours,

CASPAR DIMAN.

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Then, still covertly amused, he went in search of Ann.

At ten Cassandra appeared, in thinnest white, her expression leaning rather to insolence than to practical efficiency. If she expected to be cajoled into good humour, she was disappointed. Dr. Diman was entirely the employer, brief, impersonal, interested only in the work to be done. Neither languor nor wilful stupidity could rouse the faintest gleam of irritation. He went patiently over and over the work with her until, having brains as well as a fair amount of education, she could no longer pretend not to understand.

"I think you will do it very well indeed," he commented finally, while she sat like a simmering schoolgirl. "Keep on at this until lunch time, and don't forget to write down all telephone messages. I don't think you will come across anything puzzling."

He took up his hat and bag and went to the door, but there he paused to look back with a hint of a relenting smile. "You will find it really interesting when you get going," he assured her in a quite different tone. His friendly persuasiveness seemed only to increase her resentment: she let him go with no reply beyond an expressive lifting of her eyebrows. When he had disap-

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peared, she threw down her pen with an angry sob.

"Why should *I* have to do this?" she cried.

The sound of someone entering the next room presently made her press her trembling lips together and bend down absorbedly over her writing. Through the folding doors, wide open to-day, she could see Ann Blossom tidying the doctor's office, wholly unconscious of scrutiny. Her voice, sweet and joyous, came with a laugh as she stumbled over a footstool.

"Little stool, if you trip Ann up again, you are going to get into trouble," she announced, righting it with a reproving pat.

Ann's warmest admirer could not have called her methods of housework practical. First she swept a little, then dusted, then swept a little more, then forgot to gather up the dust in the interest of polishing the big silver inkstand with her cloth, one corner of which was moistened for the purpose in a fashion not to be commended. Then she drew the shades even, and dusted a little more, with an absent-minded good-will that presently resulted in an overturned jar of flowers and a pattering stream of water. She picked it up with remorseful tenderness.

"I'm so sorry, you poor things. Don't mind: I will get you some fresh water in two minutes."

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But the end of two minutes found her lying over the table on her elbows, drawn by the pictures of a new magazine. Presently she settled back into a chair, bringing the magazine with her, wholly lost to her surroundings. Cassandra, diverted and a little irritated — for she herself had been born with an instinct for businesslike methods — saw her presently put out her arm as though she drew some little body to her side and unconsciously bend down her cheek. She read that way for half an hour, and when finally she lifted her head, her first glance was a smiling one down by her chair. Then she saw Cassandra writing at her desk in the great hall.

“Oh, I didn’t know you were there, Miss Joyce,” she exclaimed. “I am afraid I have been making a great deal of noise. Why didn’t you tell me to shut the doors?”

“You didn’t disturb me.” Cassandra pushed back her work and clasped her hands behind her head. “I wish you had,” she added restlessly. “I wish anything would happen!”

“That bad little cat happened again.” Ann evidently considered the news exciting. “Luckily, Miss Snell was not up. I took it home and told them they really must keep it there,” she added with manifest regret. Cassandra yawned.

“Why not send Miss Snell home and keep the

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kitten?" she asked. Ann looked startled, though she laughed.

"I'm afraid Miss Snell needs us the most," she explained.

"Ah, you are all so good here!" Cassandra protested. "How is a black sheep like me to fit in?" She looked very handsome and very powerful, with one arm thrown over the back of her chair. Ann's troubled eyes fell.

"In what way should you like us different?" she asked. Cassandra turned away with an impatient lifting of her palms.

"Oh, it is I that am out of place. I am not ready for heaven yet, that is all. Heaven bores me." She turned back to the desk, digging her clenched hands into her cheeks. "And no doubt I bore you, unmercifully," she added, taking up her pen and going to work. In the silence that followed, Ann's gaze returned again and again to the handsome, severe profile. At last she drew breath, timidly, for an effort.

"We could give a tea for you, Miss Joyce."

Cassandra lifted her head, startled. The wide, sweet eyes were fixed on her with a look so kind and sorry that an impulse to derisive laughter was abruptly quenched.

"Oh, don't bother about me. I am all right," she said shortly. She tried to stop there, but the

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pent-up storm had to find expression. "How do you stand it here?" she demanded.

"Stand it? Here!" Ann had only blank amazement for the question.

"Yes, here," impatiently. "To be poor, to be nobody, to be off at one side in a hot hole without a thing to look forward to but three meals a day—" she sprang to her feet — "do you call that living?"

With the clouding of Ann's face had come a shade of reserve. "I think I call it living to be under the same roof with Dr. Diman." Her voice showed that she was deeply hurt, though not for herself. "And to be his friend, to have his affection—I call that very much more than just living." A mist dimmed her eyes. "Ah, wait till you know him; then you will understand," she said, and went hurriedly away. Cassandra stared after her with a disapproving frown.

"So the girl is in love with him," she concluded. "Ah, me, I wish I had someone to fall in love with!" A sharp clenching of her hands seemed to suggest need of a victim rather than a lover.

She had been working half the morning in the deserted living-room when the sound of a motor coming to a halt at the front gate made her glance absently towards the open windows. Through

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the shrubbery she could see the gleam of a touring car, then its occupant as he rose to alight, lifting his cap to wipe his forehead. Starting to her feet, she shrank out of range of the windows, a look of hot annoyance in her face. She waited until the caller was on the steps, for a second glance, then hurried out into the passage to intercept Hattie.

"That is a caller for me," she explained as the door-bell rang. "Please tell him that I am not at home."

"I will not," said Hattie, flatly, though without rancour. "Y'are home, ain't you?" she added in explanation before the blaze of angry astonishment in the other's eyes could find words.

"But how utterly idiotic!" Cassandra, towering mightily, might have frightened a less intrepid soul.

"A lie's a lie," said Hattie, baldly. "I'll not say y're not at home when y'are. I'll do this for you, though," she added, as though in compassion for the girl's wrath. "You run into the yard, and I'll say y're out. Hurry along, or he'll be ringin' again."

"Would you object to saying also that I shall not be in for some time?" Cassandra asked icily. Hattie considered.

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"I'll say I don't know when you'll be in; for that's true enough," she conceded. "There he goes again — scoot now, for I'll not say y're out while y're in this house."

Cassandra's rage ended in laughter as she slipped out by the kitchen and ran noiselessly round to the verandah, whence she might hear what happened at the front door. Crouching behind a vine, she could see Hattie's stout back through the open glass doors, and hear an assertive male voice.

"You don't know when she will be in?" it was repeating.

"No, sir, I couldn't say."

The caller hesitated, kicked impatiently at the step, then left a card and went away. Cassandra did not leave her hiding-place until she heard the distant departure of the motor. It had not occurred to her how her action might look until she saw a long figure in black glasses, with a step-ladder over one shoulder, staring at her in open amazement from across the lawn. Her laugh was an invitation, which he promptly accepted.

"I was merely avoiding a caller," she explained. "Hattie refused to say that I was not at home."

"Well, literally, of course," Ernest began. She frowned, shaking her head as though a gnat threatened it.

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"You are not going to raise that tiresome question!" she protested.

"I am afraid I was," he said, courageously, though he had flushed a little. She smiled with sudden liking for him, and took the trouble to mitigate her abruptness.

"It is too warm for moral questions," she begged off. "Dear me, I ought to go back; but it is too warm to work."

"It is too warm not to," Ernest corrected her with his serene smile. "Work is the only thing that makes such a day bearable."

"Your kind of work, perhaps. My kind only makes it worse. Why can't I try yours?"

"Do you think you could roll a tennis court?"

"Certainly. I didn't know that there was one."

"There isn't, really. I marked out an imitation of one on the lawn, to give Miss Blossom some lessons. It is very bad."

"I will come and look at it." She led the way with a reckless sense of escape, her heavy brown hair taking on a reddish shine in the sunlight, her gown mistily white against the grass. Ernest, shouldering the ladder, paused to take off his coloured glasses.

Presently in the deserted hall the telephone rang, and rang again; but no one heard it. It

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was ringing exasperatedly, an hour later, when Dr. Diman came in. He took down the receiver and was greeted by a relieved, "Well, Diman, have I got you at last?"

"Hello, McCarthy," he returned. "Have you been trying long?"

McCarthy, it seemed, had been trying at intervals for an hour. Dr. Diman disposed of his business somewhat absently; then, looking puzzled, he glanced into the neighbouring rooms and knocked at the southeast chamber in search of his assistant. Not finding her, he stepped out on the verandah, and was greeted by sounds of merriment. Under a huge maple, symmetrical as a pyramid, sat Cassandra, lounging in the grass with her back against the trunk, smiling indolently at Ernest, who was perched half-way up a step-ladder, clasping one thin knee and thrown back with laughter. It was a cheerful scene, but Caspar did not seem to appreciate it. Neither benignity nor amusement was conspicuous in his expression as, after a brief hesitation, he turned back to the house. Before he could take action — and action was very plainly foreshadowed in the closing of his lips — the telephone rang again: someone else had been trying for an hour to get him. Then he had to smooth out his frown as Miss Snell came drooping down the stairs.

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None of his cases mattered more to him than this melancholy and unlovely derelict. In the four months that he had had her under his care, he had put her on her feet and set her to eating three meals a day, achievements which five expensive sanitoriums had failed to accomplish. From an outside point of view, it might not seem to matter very much whether Miss Snell were in or out of bed; but it mattered intensely to the doctor, whose interest was scientific quite as much as humane, and who saw in this measure of success vindication for certain beliefs that many of his colleagues found violently irritating. The case of Miss S. was to be an important adjunct to the next edition of his book on nervous diseases.

He greeted her now with the kindly warmth that was a vital part of his treatment, and accepted with alert interest some newspaper clippings she brought. In an inspired moment he had once asked her, as a service to him, to collect from the newspapers a certain class of items; and it was after undertaking this daily bit of unselfish work that Miss Snell had begun to make definite progress. The clippings, which concerned longevity, were carefully gone over and then inserted in a scrap-book. Her long, narrow face, which seemed at first glance all nose, was almost bright by the time their task was finished.

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"I have been thinking that I would subscribe for some western papers, too," she suggested. "We might get valuable items." The enthusiasm of Caspar's assent was wholly genuine, though perhaps it was more for the aroused interest than for the plan itself.

"We are going to have a mighty interesting record here some day," he announced, replacing the scrap-book in its drawer. "By the way, where is all the family this morning?" he added. "The house seemed deserted when I came in."

"I believe Miss Myrtle is occupied in the attic; and Miss Blossom is helping her. At least, I inferred so by the incessant tramping over my head. I did think that on the third floor I should have quiet."

"The attic, to-day? How crazy!" Caspar started up. "I shall go and drag them down."

"Dr. Diman — one moment, please." Miss Snell's sallow face flushed. "There is something I must speak about. Are you sure that this Miss Joyce is quite a suitable person to introduce into your household?"

"Why, I think so. Why not?" Her lips seemed to be gathered up with a drawing-string: she said nothing. "Of course, she is new to our ways and will make blunders," he went on, "but

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I believe that there is fine stuff in the girl. She will come out all right."

The drawing-string relaxed sufficiently for a sharp, "I fear you are credulous, Dr. Diman."

He leaned against the stairpost and folded his arms across his chest. "Tell me just what you mean," he urged kindly. The smouldering grievance flamed in her little sickly eyes.

"I go simply by what she herself says. She boasted in my hearing that she crossed the ocean in company with a gentleman. What do you say to that?"

The doctor's smile was a relieved one. "Why, I should say he was a lucky fellow," he answered, cheerfully.

"I do not think you are speaking sincerely," was the cold rebuke.

"Oh, come, Miss Snell, she's an American girl, you know."

"Three years in Paris can affect even an American girl, you will discover. She gave me to understand that he paid the expenses of her trip."

Caspar became suddenly grave. "If that were true the way it sounds, do you think she would be very likely to boast of it? She has not had much show to amount to anything, but, take my word for it, she is sound fundamentally. She is

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in a hard position; I think we shall all have to help her a little — don't you?"

"I doubt if I can be of much assistance." Miss Snell turned away and affected to look for a volume in the bookcase. "The young woman seems to be quite equal to any emergency."

Caspar's troubled gaze fell, and so chanced to encounter a small object lying under a chair. He stooped and picked up a faded rag, all that remained of the spreading lavender orchid that Cassandra had worn the night before. It had suited her so well that he had given it little thought at the time, but now its luxurious suggestion brought an unwelcome question. Then, as her deep, rapid voice, careless, imperious, yet with some intangible note of honesty, came in through the open doors, he tossed the flower into the waste-basket with a shrug and went up to scold his sister. He should have stayed to scold his assistant, but he had a sudden conviction that he could accomplish that task better after he had had his luncheon.

It is not easy to rebuke a young woman of Cassandra's bearing, who shows no faintest consciousness of having been delinquent. Only a man of Caspar's perfect singleness of purpose could have confronted the prospect so placidly as he ate his hearty luncheon. He wanted Cassan-

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dra to grow into certain realizations, for the good of the world in general and of herself in particular: how he himself might appear in the process of bringing this about never crossed his mind. His entire absence of self-consciousness was always an important element of his power over beings and events. Those who called him a crank complained that he sometimes lacked a sense of the ridiculous.

The household scattered after luncheon. Several headaches were evident: Ernest was paying for the removal of the dark glasses; Ann, white and wilted, for Miss Myrtle's zeal about the state of the attic. Cassandra spent some moments in selecting a novel, and started for her own room in the wake of the others.

"Oh, Miss Joyce, I shall want you down here;" Dr. Diman was writing a letter with a fountain pen, a book balanced on his knee serving for a desk, and he spoke without lifting his eyes. Cassandra paused, pressing her novel to her side with her elbow.

"What for?" Her tone was impatient.

"I will explain in a minute. Suppose, meanwhile, you go on with those records. You don't seem to have covered much ground this morning."

She stood perfectly still. Some electrical tensi-

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in the silence suggested that if he met her eyes there would be an explosion. But he wrote busily on, without looking up, obviously without the least concern for the effect of his words. Presently she came slowly, somewhat rigidly, down and seated herself at the desk with her hands pointedly idle in her lap. Caspar turned a page and wrote on, peace and power enthroned on his wide brow; the steel strength of his broad frame was evident even in the movement of his hand across the paper. A third page was begun: Cassandra flung back her head with an exasperated clenching of her fingers. Nevertheless, before the page was turned again, she had taken up her pen and gone to work. He left her alone for ten minutes longer; then she suddenly found him standing beside her, his hands in his coat pockets, his eyes both kind and sorry.

"Miss Joyce, we must understand each other a little better," he began. Her mouth stiffened defensively, but he was undismayed. "You see, you have never worked before, so, naturally, you don't know anything about being — hired." He smiled over the last word, but her straight gaze was unrelentingly stony. "It means a great many things that are unpleasant at first, I suppose. You can't sell your time, you know, and have it, too. I urged you to come here because I thought

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it would be a good thing for us both, and I am sure it will be. But I don't want you to look on the work as an imposition on my part, or a favour on yours. Don't you see that that isn't reasonable?"

She kept obstinately silent at first, but he waited. Then the storm broke.

"Reasonable!" Her voice trembled with passionate contempt. "What do I care about reasonable! I can only see that my life has come to an end — what is there here for a woman like me? I thought it was bad enough with Louisa, but at least I had Paris! How can you expect me to endure this little bourgeois hole with frumps and school-teachers for companions? Reasonable! Oh, good God!"

He was desperately sorry, but unshaken. "It won't seem like that to you in a little while — take my word for it, it won't," he told her earnestly. "But if, after a fair trial, you still hate it, I shall be the last person to urge your staying. I will help you as best I can to get established somewhere else. I promise you that."

"But where — what can I do?" Her rage had abated, but she would not be conciliated. "I have no relatives to speak of — none that I can stand. And those who might have helped, lost too much money by my father's failure; they

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naturally don't feel impelled to house his daughter. No, there is nothing left for me but to die. I do wish I could."

"You are too thorough a sport to say or think that," he protested. "A girl with your bearing isn't a quitter."

"Oh, words, words!" She flung out her hands in exasperation. "I will do the work — I'll stick it out for a week or two, anyway. But, for heaven's sake, don't expect me to be a good girl and love my task. I know what I want, and it isn't here — that is all there is about it. All the kind, wise, high-class talk in the world isn't going to make an atom of difference. Can't you see that for yourself?"

His answer was a counter question. "If you can't stick it out — what then?" She turned away with a defiant narrowing of her eyes.

"We will see when the time comes. Now, do you want me to go on with those records?"

"Yes, for the next few days. Don't work after four o'clock." He would have lingered, but she had pointedly gone to work, so he accepted his dismissal and closed the door of his office between them. Nothing had been said about the telephone, after all.

Few patients came, for Dr. Diman's fame as a nerve specialist had long ago forced him to give

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up general practice. Cassandra had a dim idea of punishing him by working until dinner time, but when he hurried off, an hour later, his mind was so obviously remote from her and her martyrdom that she abandoned the idea and stopped on the first stroke of four. The neat pages of the record book began to look imposing, but she would have died rather than admit a pride in them.

As she rose, ill luck directed Miss Snell down the stairs in search of the faint breeze that had begun to stir the garden. Her hands were so filled with bottles, cushions, and books that she was quite justified in asking help in regard to the linen parasol in the closet under the stairs. But her manner of asking it was unfortunate, especially as addressed to Cassandra. The doctor's assistant looked at her coolly from head to foot, then turned to the wall and pulled an old-fashioned crimson bell rope, coeval with the rep curtains, that had been left hanging more as a bit of local colour than for any practical purpose. Miss Snell's face became a dull, even red under its patch of little sandy curls.

"Perhaps I am mistaken, Miss Joyce, in supposing that you are employed here?" Her courtesy was excruciating. "Dr. Diman certainly gave me to understand —"

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"Mademoiselle rang?" Ronsard was hovering in the doorway, looking agitated. Never before in his experience had the house bell rung, and a bony brown hand had to be pressed over his heart to quiet it.

"Oh, Ronsard, — thank you for coming." Cassandra's tone could be wonderfully sweet. "Miss Snell would like the linen parasol from under the stairs brought out to her in the garden. Perhaps you will be so kind?"

"But surely — with the greatest willingness!" His wide-armed bow was received by Miss Snell's rigidly departing back, but his courtesy was proof against anything; it would not even let him look puzzled. "If my old eyes can but distinguish it —" he was fumbling helplessly in the closet, and Cassandra, having routed the enemy, came to his aid.

"Here it is, and thank you, Ronsard. I don't know what I should do without you," she said in French, and he went off beaming, offering to the shrubbery the little bows that rose up like bubbles from his deeply gratified spirit.

By dinner time a strong breeze was sweeping through the house, scattering headaches and bringing everyone down refreshed in spirit. Dr. Diman had not returned, but Miss Myrtle plaintively explained just what housekeeping would

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be if they attempted to wait meals for him. It was not a very satisfying dinner, for Ronsard had quite forgotten to put the roast in the oven until Hattie asked for it with a view to setting it on the table.

"I am sure nobody wants hot meat after such a day," was Ann Blossom's cheerful comment, and indeed no one did, but Miss Myrtle could not be comforted. Even after they had left the table the topic continued.

"If you had to do the housekeeping for a few days, you would understand what I go through," she was assuring them, when a burst of thunder seemed to crack the sky just over their heads, letting fall a torrent of rain. Miss Snell gasped and fled to her room, having a theory that the great hall chimney made that spot especially dangerous; and Miss Myrtle panted after her to attend to the windows. Ann Blossom stood in the doorway, trying to listen.

"He will be so wet," she worried. Cassandra's glance was impatient; people in love always seemed to her a little absurd.

"Perhaps he will have sense enough to stay under cover," she suggested.

"He won't," said Ann, positively. She continued to watch there, with occasional excursions to the end of the verandah, while Cassandra

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settled herself by an open window, head tilted back and arms thrown out to invite the fragrant coolness. Ernest, after wandering about for a few minutes, came to a temporary halt beside her, perching on the arm of a chair. She let her eyes rest on him without troubling to turn her head.

He had pleased her that morning, this guileless, intelligent young man who had challenged her to definitions with the assurance of a school-master, and answered imperious questions about himself with the trustful simplicity of a little boy. She had taken a whim to know about his past life, and apparently nothing in it had been hidden from her. The meagre tale of poverty and work, with its pitiful triumph of a professorship at an obscure college, had oppressed and angered her, for the difference between nothing a year and twelve hundred a year seemed to her scarcely worth considering, certainly not at all worth such heart-breaking efforts; and his good-humoured satisfaction with his lot was in her eyes a species of stupidity. Yet he was nice to look at, in spite of his thinness and his scholarly pallor, and his manners, though old-fashioned and a trifle too formal, were nevertheless manners, and so gave him a touch of social grace sadly lacking in Dr. Diman. On the whole, he was an

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acquisition, and she welcomed him with a faint smile.

"I suppose you know that an open window is not the safest place in a thunder-storm," he began. Her gaze went back to the flashing, resounding night.

"It would be a very easy death," she answered, indifferently.

"But why die?" he demanded, kindling at the hope of an argument.

"Why not?" she returned. It baffled him for a moment.

"You don't really mean that," he protested. She looked amused.

"People always say, 'You don't mean that,' I notice, when they happen not to agree with you."

"Well, then, if you mean what you imply, you must defend it;" and he settled down to the topic with his hands clasped about one knee, combative enthusiasm in his pleasant face. Her lids drooped expressively.

"It is too much trouble," she murmured.

"There he is," cried Ann, darting out. She brought Caspar in with a hand on his drenched shoulder, scolding him affectionately.

"Now you go and change everything while I get your dinner," she commanded, and he dripped

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obediently up the stairs as she flew off to the kitchen. The smile with which he had received his orders was irritating to Cassandra, whom he had not seen; it was too warm, too wholly without reservations. What it expressed seemed too much for a man of his power to expend on a crude young nobody, no matter how adoring she showed herself. One could not especially value the esteem of a man who set such store on a mere Ann Blossom.

"Do you like it here as much as Miss Blossom does?" she asked suddenly.

"I should say so."

"Why?"

"Why?" Ernest meditated. "There are so many reasons. For one thing, just knowing a man like Dr. Diman, seeing him every day and —"

"Yes, yes." She moved her head restlessly. "I know that reason — it is a privilege to be his friend, and all that. But, besides that —?"

"Well, Miss Joyce, when a man has no home and no capital, and he is suddenly told that he must stop work for a year — did it ever occur to you to wonder what he does?"

"And so Dr. Diman hired you to look after his garden?"

"Hired? Oh, dear me, no. He invited me to come here and live until I was ready for work

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again. I insisted on the gardening as some small return."

"Then he does not pay you?"

"Indeed, no. The debt is all the other way."

"Does he pay Miss Blossom?"

"Why, he has — helped her more or less, I believe; but not as pay for services. She gives those out of pure gratitude, and he only lets her because the work does her good."

"He pays me," said Cassandra, after a pause.

"Ah, well, that is probably different:" he seemed embarrassed by her frankness.

The doctor spoke to them as he came down, but went on to the dining-room without pausing. Through the open doors they could hear Ron-sard explaining with anguish the lack of a roast, and Caspar's deep laugh at the news. Between them, he and Ann evidently restored the old chef to self-respect; there was even a ghost of a responsive cackle as he finally took himself off.

"Why different?" asked Cassandra.

"I suppose our difficulties are more — temporary." Ernest spoke reluctantly, his eyes averted. "I shall go back to my work in September."

"And Miss Blossom — will she go back to hers?"

A smile crossed his face, though he dropped his

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head to hide it. "I am not sure — that she will," he said. Cassandra stared at him frowningly.

"Good heavens, does he think Dr. Diman would marry that girl!" was her impatient comment; but she kept it to herself. Ann's joyous laugh, echoed by a deep note from Caspar, came to them from the dining-room, moving her to protest. "You people here are all so outrageously cheerful! Even in my good days, when I had everything, I didn't feel like that."

Ernest's face brightened at the opportunity she gave him. "Ah, but had you everything?" he asked triumphantly.

"Money, position, youth, health, decently good looks, freedom — I always did exactly what I pleased; I fancy that is about everything."

"And you were unhappy?"

"Oh, not in a white rage, as I am now most of the time; but I don't remember ever feeling — well, as Miss Blossom would, for instance, if she baked a cake and it turned out eatable; or if someone gave her a lace collar. I suppose I lack a capacity for happiness."

"I don't believe that, Miss Joyce. The flaw is in your definition of 'everything;' you have left out the things that count most."

"And what are they?"

"One of them is work. For a girl like you,

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beauty and money and all that are not really anything, after a while."

"How 'like me'?" She had a look of amusement for this unsophisticated young professor's estimate of Cassandra Joyce, product of complex experiences.

"I may be all wrong, of course;" he was evidently finding the tête-à-tête exciting; "but it seems to me that you might have business abilities, that you might run something with decision and judgment and make a great success of it. I couldn't, myself, at all; I should potter over details and forget what I was doing. But you have — I don't know — head, power — something like that. And people who have that are not happy unless they are using it."

She was not displeased at the idea. "If I only had something worth running!" she commented. "Find me that and I will try your prescription."

"But work is only half of my prescription, Miss Joyce."

"What is the other half?"

"I should think a young lady could guess." The speech and the little bow that went with it were archaic, professorial. Cassandra made a mental note to break him of this occasional floridness, as well as of saying "Miss Joyce" so often.

"Oh, love!" she shrugged with rather exag-

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gerated contempt. "Do you still romance about that over here?"

"Indeed we do. I mean every kind, you know, down to what you give a dog."

"Up to what you give a dog," she corrected him. "I am sure I have never cared for a human being half as much as I did for my old French bulldog."

"Then I envy you; you have the best thing in life still before you."

"How young you are!"

He was not at all disconcerted. "Wait a little," he warned her. "You can't live with Dr. Diman and not have affections — it is impossible. And once they are started — I am sorry we have not a dog for you to begin on."

"I might begin on you," suggested Cassandra. He laughed, a startled, almost a shocked, laugh; then he took it up with a courage that showed him capable of learning.

"Excellent idea! Pray use me to any extent."

"But suppose you don't like me — do I have to go on just the same?"

He kept up bravely. "I should not worry about that."

"How do I start?"

"Well, instead of thinking, 'He is only an obscure professor of botany,' you must say to your-

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self, 'He's a friendly soul who would take a great deal of trouble for my comfort or enjoyment; and he is just as responsive to cordiality as if he had a tail to wag. How pleasant that is!' And presently you will be feeling a real affection."

"What will be the good of that?"

"What is the good of sunlight, or an open fire? Warmth and cheer."

She considered him reflectively. "You are very nice," she admitted. "I really think I could teach you a thing or two." He was having a good many shocks, this young professor. For an instant his candid face betrayed that her teaching him was a wholly new idea; but he caught up as nimbly as he had before.

"I am sure of it, Miss Joyce," he said, with his little bow. "And if there is anything I can teach you in return —"

"Aren't you to teach me how to develop affections?"

"To be sure. It is a bargain, then," and he held out his hand. To respond with her own bored Cassandra: shaking hands on bargains seemed to her crude and sentimental. She let her fingers rest in his a scant second, and was annoyed that she had done so much when she realized that Dr. Diman and Ann Blossom must have seen the action from the doorway. She rose

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as they entered and came over to the lamp with an obviously suppressed yawn.

"Have you been dining all this time?" she asked, turning over the books on the centre table.

"No; we have been talking." Caspar's tone was civil, nothing more; all the warm cordiality was gone.

"Oh, what have I done now!" was Cassandra's impatient thought, and she turned her back on him. Ann Blossom was looking at her with a strained expression that flashed into her vivid smile as their eyes met.

"I am afraid I have been very selfish, keeping Dr. Diman all to myself," she said, in her sweet, joyous voice. "But we were having *such* a nice time."

"Mr. Cunningham has been very good about amusing me," said Cassandra, turning to the stairs. "I am going to let him off now. Good night."

"I think I shall go, too," added Ann. Ernest looked back at her from the window. "The rain has stopped," he said. "Don't you want a constitutional on the verandah?"

"Not to-night. I am too sleepy." And she went up-stairs humming softly to herself. Ernest soon followed, and Dr. Diman, left alone, settled

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down to a pile of medical magazines. But he did not at once begin reading; and his eyes, lifted towards the door of the southeast chamber, were grave to the verge of severity.

At twelve o'clock he was roused from his reading by quick, heavy steps above. Miss Myrtle in a grey flannel wrapper, her face suggesting recent sleep, came fumbling down the stairs in distressful haste, a slip of paper in her hand.

"What's up, Myrtle?" Caspar had started to his feet.

"Oh, Caspar, is that you? I forgot to order the extra milk for the pudding to-morrow — it woke me out of a sound sleep. I sat right up in bed, my heart pounding, just as if someone had called me, and I had such a time finding the matches. I don't suppose I shall sleep again for hours."

Caspar dropped back in his chair with expressive heaviness. "Why in thunder didn't you let it go?"

"But, my dear brother, you can't have a rice pudding without milk."

"Have another dessert, then — have fruit — anything."

"But I had said we would have rice pudding. If you knew more about housekeeping, Caspar, you wouldn't always be finding fault with me."

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And Miss Myrtle gathered her wrapper about her with plaintive dignity. He shook his head in good-humoured protest.

"And you had *said* you would overhaul the attic — so you did, with the thermometer at ninety-eight! Ah, Myrtle, if you had only been ten years younger than I instead of ten years older, I might have done something with you. See here; wouldn't you be happier if I got someone else in to do the housekeeping?"

She stopped tragically. "Caspar Diman! *Have* you another case up your sleeve?"

He laughed. "No, on my honour, not one at the present moment." She went on towards the kitchen with a sigh of tempered relief.

"Nice housekeeper you'd bring home — fits or melancholia," she muttered. "By the way, what is Ann Blossom doing up so late?" she added. "I saw a light under her door."

"You did?" Caspar was frowningly concerned. Then he threw his pamphlet sharply down on the table. "No, Myrtle, I am towing home no more derelicts this week," he assured her, with grim emphasis.

III

DR. DIMAN let himself in and, with his hat still clinging to the extreme back of his head, picked up the pad on which telephone messages were written. The writing seemed to take more of his attention than the messages themselves. After a thoughtful moment, he gave a whistled call. It was eagerly answered, and Ann Blossom appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Hello!" she welcomed him.

"See here, Ann Blossom!" He held up the pad with affectionate severity. "How does it happen that I am always finding your writing on this instead of Miss Joyce's?"

"Oh, well, when I am going to be right here, anyway, I might as well answer it," she explained, coming down in little jumps, her weight resting on the banister. "It is nearly always my suggestion."

"Yes; but for you to be 'right here anyway' is exactly what I don't want. You are supposed to be out of doors every spare moment, while Miss Joyce's health can stand any amount of — where is she now?"

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"I think she is playing tennis with Ernest;" Ann spoke brightly, though her eyes did not meet his.

"Oh, she is! Well, take yourself out of doors, young woman, and on the way tell her that I want her."

Ann hesitated, a faint red showing through her transparent skin. She took breath nervously to speak, but he had turned to Cassandra's desk and was inspecting her untouched work with a gravity that made him seem a person to be obeyed without protest. Perhaps, too, Ann was not wholly reluctant, though her hands were tremulous as she opened the glass doors. The doctor had not been so unconscious of her mood as he seemed: he looked after her with a sharp breath of perplexity as he threw aside his hat and ran his fingers up into his rough hair. He was leaning against the desk with arms folded across his chest, waiting in rather awful tranquillity, when Cassandra came in.

She looked very handsome in her white tennis shirt, open at the throat. Her heavy, bright brown hair was always perfectly in place; only the flush in her cheeks showed that she had been exercising. Her glance was imperious.

"You wanted me?" The question subtly conveyed a well-bred surprise at the summons.

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"Yes, I did." He paused, deliberating just where he should begin, but Cassandra, furious at the quickened beat of her own heart, refused to wait.

"Well, what have I done?" she asked with all the insolence she could command.

"I can't see that you have done much of anything, this morning," was the quiet answer. She came down a little.

"I expected to write those letters after lunch," she condescended to explain. "I did not know there was any hurry."

"And was there nothing else to be done? I thought we had discussed several ways in which you could be of use." If he had spoken impatiently, it would have been easier to face him; but he was as calm as he was inexorable. She dropped into a chair, occupying herself with a palm-leaf fan.

"I did offer to read to Miss Snell, but she refused — very rudely."

"I should rather like to know in what terms you made the offer."

"Certainly." Her eyes flashed. "I said, 'I will read to you if you will take something decently entertaining and won't rock.' I simply cannot stand the way she rocks and keeps one foot going."

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"Is that the extent of your morning's work?"

"No: I rearranged the flowers, and Miss Myrtle nearly bit my head off. It seems she prefers geraniums and petunias in the same vase. Then I gave up and played tennis."

"And didn't that worry you at all?"

"Why?" Her surprise was genuine.

"Has nothing worried you in the five weeks you have been here?" he persisted.

"I don't understand!"

"Has it never occurred to you that if you are paid thirty dollars a month, you must earn a dollar a day? You are here as an employee on a salary: can you be comfortable if you are not at least trying to earn it?"

The blood rushed into her face. "Well, I must say —!" burst from her.

"No, you must not," he cut in with an incisiveness that checked her. "The time has come when I must say. I have waited, hoping that you would see for yourself, but you do less every day. You owe me your time and your real efforts just as surely as I owe you thirty dollars a month. Your hothouse life is left behind you: you are in the business world now, and you must obey its laws or go under. And the first law is that you deliver the goods — if you are paid for services, you give them."

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She rose, white and trembling. "Please understand that I have handed in my resignation," she said in a choked voice, turning to go.

"No: I will understand nothing of the sort." He did not move, but his voice arrested her. "You are too good to be wasted, Cassandra Joyce. I feel it every day — your brains and practical ability, your honesty, your fearlessness. Learn to work, and you can be anything you will. No, I refuse to give you up."

She threw herself into a chair with her face hidden against the back. "Oh, I want to go, I want to go," she cried. The ready compassion sprang into his eyes.

"But, my dear girl, where can you go without money?" he asked in a wholly different tone. She raised her head with a flash of renewed anger.

"I can have millions any moment, simply by lifting my finger."

"But where — how?"

"By marriage."

His silence lasted so long that she stole a look at him, vaguely frightened. He was staring at the floor as though he had forgotten her, but at her movement he let his folded arms drop and came over to her with a rather tired smile.

"Well, if it is someone you care for, that is of

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course the simplest way out of it," he said. "Will you tell me about him?"

She lay back passively, her eyes half closed. "There is very little to tell. His name is Burnett — George Burnett. He is over forty, a business man — leather, I believe: he is enormously rich. I knew him in Paris and he crossed when I did."

"And you think that you —" the doctor hesitated.

"The chief objection is that he is not a gentleman," she went on indifferently.

"Do you mean that he lacks social knowledge?"

"Oh, no — he is not a rough diamond. He is rather coarse, that is all. Not more so than some aristocrats I have known, but, unfortunately, his coarseness is the wrong kind. Moreover, his past life has been anything but — edifying, and I doubt my powers as a reformer. So, you see, I have hesitated."

His answer was an odd one, coming from him. "Couldn't you do any better?" he asked. There was relief as well as surprise in her quick glance. Evidently she had not dreamed of being met so understandingly.

"Of course I could have, three years ago," she said with less of defiance in her frankness.

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"But I was a young fool. There have been men since, too — but I was still a fool. It did not occur to me that I might have to compromise. I have always supposed that I was born to the best of everything," she added, with bitter self-derision.

"Of course, I don't know;" Caspar spoke mildly, reasonably; "but I should suppose that earning millions that way would be a long sight worse than earning next to nothing this way."

"Perhaps — I can't say. I haven't decided. Now is there anything else I am to be scolded for?" And she smiled with restored impertinence.

"Yes, several things;" but it was the man, not the employer, who had answered her smile. "I think we will save them for another day, however."

"You had better do it while I am in a chastened mood," she advised. "I might not be so meek, next time."

He laughed at the term "meek" in connection with Cassandra Joyce, laughed with deeply appreciative enjoyment.

"I can't attack you when you invite it like this; it is too unnatural," he protested.

"Then I may consider myself forgiven, for this once?" And she looked up at him with

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open consciousness of power, power over man. That mysterious ascendancy known as the upper hand was suddenly hers.

"Ah, you will always be forgiven, I am afraid," he was beginning impulsively, when Ann's voice, suddenly restored to its note of joyousness, sounded from the garden, breaking the spell that had held their eyes. He turned to his office, his face clouding. "Unless you make my Ann Blossom unhappy," he added in a low tone as he shut the door between them.

She sat with downcast eyes and idle hands for a long time, held by that last warning. What had he meant about making Ann Blossom unhappy — "my Ann Blossom"? She turned irritably from the phrase, but it clung to her like a thorn, wounding and enraging. *His* Ann Blossom! His if he wanted her, obviously; but how could he dream of so throwing himself away? Was he begging her not to come between them? The idea startled her, then she laughed contemptuously at herself. It would be so like him, man of indomitable strength, to beg quarter from her, the least of his derelicts. *His* Ann Blossom? Very well, then: so be it. And she bent doggedly to her work.

When the doctor had expostulated with her, five weeks before, all his warmth and gentleness

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could not allay her angry resentment; she had been fiercely ready to punish him for the reproof ever since. To-day's lecture, curiously enough, sharp and unsympathetic as it was, left no bitterness. He had said things that gave her every excuse for resentment, yet all her desire to strike back was inexplicably gone. She felt only heavy-hearted and bewildered, strangely humble before his disapprobation. In truth, she had never in her life come so near deserving the term "meek" as on that long summer day when she sat trying to do her work well and to forget his baffling plea for "his" Ann Blossom.

Caspar did not come home to dinner, and in the warm twilight afterwards Ann frankly posted herself on the front steps to watch for him. Cassandra tried to keep aloof, but she presently followed, seating herself on the dusty old balustrade with an indifference to her white skirt that made Ann protest. Ann's face, which had lately carried a secret shadow, was whole-heartedly gay to-night.

"I finished your set for you this morning, and lost every single point," she said with a laugh, turning from Ernest, who had been absently hosing one unlucky clematis for the past ten minutes. "He says I am the worst beginner he ever saw!" Ernest, discovering the lake about his

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feet, placidly transferred the water to a more distant vine.

"Well, you see, the balls are so round and white and little, Miss Blossom can't bear to hit them," he explained, smiling up at Ann, whose laughter ran over at the idea.

"I try hard enough, but the bad little things dodge me," she complained. "Some people are born to do things well and some aren't. I should know that you played good tennis, Miss Joyce, if I only passed you on the street, and you'd know that I wouldn't."

"You mean that you would know that as a corollary to some more general knowledge," Ernest interposed. "You can state it more broadly — put it in terms of character." Ann's glance rested indulgently, yet with a glimmer of mischief, on the alert young schoolmaster.

"And, passing you, Ernest," she went on deliberately, "I should know in an instant that if you saw a chance for an argument or a definition, you would inevitably aim the hose straight through the cellar window."

Ernest jerked the stream of water to a new angle with a rueful laugh. "Thank goodness Miss Myrtle didn't see that," he was beginning, when that lady appeared at the open front door behind them. She was sniffing anxiously.

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"Where do you suppose all the smoke is coming from?" she asked.

They noticed then that the haze had taken on a yellowish tinge, and that there was an ominous fragrance of distant burning in the air. Ann ran up to the top of the house, and reported dense smoke far across the town.

"Oh, dear, I am afraid it is some big fire," she exclaimed, her eyes widened for the distress that that meant.

"And I suppose Caspar has gone to it," sighed Miss Myrtle. "Why he has to mix himself up in everything that happens —!"

"But what good could he do at a fire?" Cassandra asked, a quick note of protest in her voice. Ann's thin hands were tightly clasped.

"Oh, I wish he would come home!" she said, a catch of fright in her voice. Cassandra turned from her impatiently; the girl seemed to think she had the exclusive right to be anxious.

"I don't see what could happen to him," she said, with a perverse denial of her own secret uneasiness. Ann did not heed, but Miss Myrtle explained how many coats he had ruined and hats he had lost, "plunging into things." She was still plaintively scolding when a carriage drew up at the gate and Dr. Diman jumped out.

Ann sprang up with a little note of joy, but

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stopped where she was, startled and puzzled, for the carriage had begun to disgorge. Through the half darkness they saw seven small white objects flop down, one after another, then the carriage departed and Caspar turned in at the gate, followed by a curious procession. The group on the steps stared in breathless silence as the white objects filing up the path gradually defined themselves as seven little boys in their nightshirts. They were all about the same size, with bare feet and closely cropped heads; two or three carried small treasures clasped in their arms, and all were big-eyed with excitement.

"What on earth!" stuttered Miss Myrtle. Caspar, made aware of the staring group, hesitated before them, the procession lining up behind him; for the first time in his life, he faced his sister with a faint cringe of propitiation.

"I couldn't help it, Myrtle," he apologized. "The orphan asylum has burned up!"

The nightgowned seven repeated his upward look of anxious apology. Before Miss Myrtle could draw breath enough for speech, the solemnity of the moment was shattered by a gasp of laughter from Cassandra. Caspar, abruptly reminded of his aspect at the head of his little band, gave them a startled glance: the corners of his mouth twitched helplessly for an instant, then

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he threw back his head and frankly shouted. The others echoed him; even the seven, realizing their costume, broke into seven shrill giggles. Only Miss Myrtle stood heavily silent.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," she remarked.

Caspar pulled himself back to sobriety as Ann went on her knees by the children, gathering them into her arms with eager questions, feeling their hands to see if they were cold.

"It is only for to-night, Myrtle," he explained. "Other asylums will take them all over by to-morrow, but to-night they have to be farmed out everywhere. We can put up cots in my office, and the sitting-room couches will hold hold two or three. Get some linen, there's a good soul. They are tired kids." And he rubbed his hand affectionately over the tow head at his side.

"It will make a dreadful wash for this week," sighed Miss Myrtle; but she went.

Ann was deputed to carry the children off to her room and get them as quieted as possible while their beds were prepared; and Caspar paused to direct Cassandra's eyes to the picture she made on the broad curve of the stairs, mothering all seven with her extended hands and smiling eyes.

"Very pretty," said Cassandra, dryly. "I

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don't care for children, myself," she added. If she courted disapprobation, she was disappointed; the note of defiance was too naïvely clear. He met it as he might have met a piece of naughtiness from one of the orphans up-stairs; that is to say, he smiled at her with his measureless and unbounded comprehension and set her to work. Together they cleared space for the cots Ernest was getting down from the attic, and Cassandra, after a moment of seething resentment, dropped suddenly to humble gratitude that he was not chilled towards her. She made up the little beds under his directions with apologetic zeal.

Caspar hesitated over the living-room couches. "I don't know about putting them here. Perhaps I'd better give them my room," he reflected. "You see, the poor little shrimps will have to stay in bed until I can buy them new clothes, and the shops won't be open before eight."

"You don't want to buy them clothes." Cassandra always spoke with authority on a practical issue. "People will give you all you need, and more."

"But collecting them would take half the morning."

"Do it now — it isn't late. Get your carriage and drive to all the people you know who have little boys. You can collect plenty for them to

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begin on." He looked at his watch, then nodded at her approvingly.

"That is a good scheme. I'll do it." He turned away to order the horse, but at the door he paused and glanced back. "Will you go with me?"

"Yes, gladly;" she spoke indifferently, ashamed that she should be so glad. "He would have taken his Ann Blossom if it weren't for the children," she reminded herself as she shook the last pillow into its case.

Fifteen minutes later they started, leaving Ann to tuck up the orphans. Caspar, helping his assistant into the buggy, looked with appreciation at the fresh white coat she had put on.

"What pretty things women have to wear," he commented.

"Yes, aren't they nice;" and she glanced down at her glimmering whiteness with frank enjoyment. He pulled up at the gate and, leaning down from the buggy, cut off a sturdy little yellow rose that was thrusting towards them from the clustered darkness of the shrubbery.

"There is a decoration for you," he said, laying it on her knee, and looked at her with satisfaction when it was fastened to her coat. "I sometimes think that I am too careless about appearances," he confided, as though the idea

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would be a wholly new one to her. Her glance at his shapeless old serge coat was malicious.

"Really?" she murmured. It was not too dark for him to see the derision of her lifted eyebrows, and he laughed out at himself.

"Am I such a very awful sight?" he asked. "Tell me the truth."

She left the question suspended to comment, lazily, "Did you ever know me to tell anything but the truth?"

"No. Oh, no, you wouldn't lie; you've got too much moral impudence." They both laughed at that. "Well, then, answer my question: is my appearance too shocking?"

"It is," said Cassandra. He sighed.

"Myrtle always says so, but she says so many things — I hoped it wasn't so bad as all that. Well, some day I will pick up a broken-down valet in need of a job, and then you will see a reform."

"Would you use a valet?" she demanded in surprise.

"Would I hire someone to do necessary work that I had no time for myself? Certainly. Why not?"

"I don't know." She was obviously pleased. "I supposed you had a democratic scorn of valets and maids and all such poms and vanities."

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"So I have, as poms. I don't like display and I don't like personal laziness. But as a legitimate short cut — if a maid would leave you free to do things better worth while than brushing your clothes, then have one, by all means."

"Thanks, I will," said Cassandra, as he stopped the horse in front of a large, pleasant house suggestive of many children, and handed her the reins.

"Let me see; six and seven year sizes?" he reflected.

"Anything between five and eight would fit somebody, I should think."

"And we want anything they can spare?"

"Anything we can get."

He turned away with a laugh. "I always knew you had business ability," he commented.

He was gone fifteen or twenty minutes, but Cassandra lay back contentedly, watching the stealing whiteness of the rising moon on lawn and shrub and the soft blackening of the maple shadows down the quiet street. The bitterness of the morning seemed as remote as her life in Paris. All the clamouring questions of her daily impatience for once were stilled; she was satisfied to study leaf patterns and to smell the little rose on her coat.

Caspar came back rejoicing in a huge bundle. Two more raids in the next block brought further

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contributions. After some hesitation, they turned in at the gates of a big place, girt with elms, then, finding the house dark, they drove quietly out again, feeling rather furtive. The next two ventures proved so successful that Caspar decided they had enough to begin on. He was in boyishly high spirits as they drove home with their brimming cargo.

"The orphans will be well dressed, even if I am not," he commented.

"There is a light in that house; perhaps we could pick up a suit for you there," she suggested. He looked alarmed.

"You don't mean to say that I have really got to reform? I thought we could simply laugh about it — and let it go at that."

"Well — if you will agree to treat my delinquencies that way."

He laughed. "I will make no unholy bargains with you. Why does it matter, anyway?" he added.

"Because it does," said Cassandra, with youthful finality.

"Do you mean that it comes between me and other people? — so that, instead of listening to my words of wisdom, they are thinking, 'Good Heavens, why doesn't the man get his coat pressed!' — is that it?"

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She hesitated. "Your Ann Blossom would not think so," she was impelled to say, her tone faintly derisive. If she hoped to dare him with impunity, she was disappointed; the very angle of his shoulders expressed a subtle withdrawal.

"Ah, there are few natures like my Ann Blossom," was the cool answer. "I meant with the average, superficial person, who can not see much below the surface."

"Like me," assented Cassandra, scorning to ignore her punishment. "Really, I can't say. Nothing — here matters very much to me, one way or the other."

"I am sorry for that," he said, with unfeeling cheerfulness, as they turned in at the gate.

A night light that had been left between the living-room and the office showed the seven little sleepers lying in deep-breathing peace. Caspar laughed silently at the picture.

"Looks like a battlefield," he murmured, as he pulled the covers over straying legs and arms. "Have you noticed this angelic little Deutcher?" He had paused by the big couch where two were tucked up, and she obeyed his tacit command to come and look. The upturned face, guilelessly broad for its length, was a soft, even pink from the throat to the thicket of tow hair, and lavishly set for dimples. Blond eyelashes turned up in

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appealing little ducktails from his tightly shut eyelids; his widely curving lips had the smile of cherubim. The boy beside him, though little older, had left babyhood so far behind that one must doubt if he had ever experienced it: the thin, dun face, open-mouthed, could make only a sociological appeal. But the little Deutcher had all the charm of puppyhood in his innocent curves. "He says his name is Villum. He has been in the asylum only a few weeks; he had a mother until then, he told me."

"I daresay some asylums are better than some mothers," observed Cassandra, suspecting an attack on her sympathies and instantly defensive.

"I don't doubt it." If an attack had been intended, it was abandoned with perfect cheerfulness. "Would you mind leaving your door open?" he added as they went up-stairs. "I should probably hear any disturbance, but if I did not, you could call me."

She assented with a readiness tinged with penitence. "I didn't mean to be snubby," she told herself uncomfortably, after he had gone. "Or, at least, I meant to be, but I wish I hadn't," she added with a faint sigh.

She was a long time getting to sleep. The night was warm, and that peaceful hour of escape from her troubled self made the return doubly

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exasperating. All the small struggles of the past weeks came back to haunt her.

"I hate it, I hate it," she cried to herself, flinging her restless arms wide for coolness. The stinging rebuke of the morning was, strangely enough, the only source of comfort. She clung with inexplicable satisfaction to the memory of Caspar's uncompromising words, the inflexible sternness of him as he faced her over his folded arms. It was only when he spoke of "his" Ann Blossom that he offended and humiliated her. That he should so blindly exalt a crude, ignorant young girl!

She slept at last, but so lightly that only a very faint sound was needed to rouse her. As she listened with lifted head and eyes instantly wide awake, the sound located itself in the big room below, and proved to be a smothered, disjointed sobbing. Throwing on a dressing-gown, she went swiftly to the stairs and listened again. The night light showed the newest orphan with burrowing face and shaken shoulders.

Cassandra's first impulse was to call the doctor; but she went reluctantly down instead and stood beside the couch, looking uncomfortably at the little heaving back.

"What is the matter, child?" she demanded.

An incoherent mutter about fire and big engines

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and my mother came from the pillow where Villum, face down, writhed between sleep and terror. Cassandra, feeling oddly helpless and embarrassed, turned him over in the hope that a chance to breathe might prove soothing.

"You are all right," she assured him. "The fire is out. Now go to sleep like a good boy."

Villum's pale blue eyes, pathetically drowned, stared wildly about him; his hands fastened in a hot grasp on her kimono and the sobs increased. She sat down beside him with a sigh of perplexity.

"Hush, hush!" she exclaimed. "You will wake the other little boys. You don't want to do that, do you?" Her nearness was perhaps more soothing than her argument. Villum, subsiding into quivering sighs, gasped out a desire for a "trink of water." Greatly relieved by this practical suggestion, Cassandra hurried off, taking the light with her. It did not occur to her that this might produce fresh disaster until a rising wail penetrated to the pantry. She flew back, the glass dripping water on her slippers.

"Child, child!" she implored. "There is nothing to cry about. Do be reasonable!" She was too intent to notice a figure that had paused abruptly at the stair head on her entrance, and now shrank back soundlessly into the darkness of the upper hall. "Here is your water," she went

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on, as the wail dropped to hiccoughing reassurance. Villum grasped the glass in two straining hands with fingers hooked desperately over the top and bent his face to it, but looked up a moment later with the plaintive information,

"It iss running my bed all over!" It undeniably was. She righted the glass with a weary, "Oh, dear!" and caught away the wet sheet before it could touch his nightgown.

"Now if I go up-stairs to get another sheet, will you promise not to howl again?" she asked. The broad, pink face was instantly creased into weeping lines; the blue eyes filled.

"I do not want that you leave me;" the voice was sorrowful rather than whimpering; a little hand closed tightly on her loose sleeve. The lurking figure at the head of the stairs might have come to her rescue, but he only shrank back still farther in the upper darkness, his eyes deeply, warmly amused, and began a furtive retreat. "I want that you take me on your lap," continued Villum, his head tipped back as though he knew that a whole view of his angelic countenance was his best plea. In spite of herself, she relented a little.

"You are a nuisance," she protested, but she gave up her wavering intention of summoning

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help. Dr. Diman was tired with his long day's work; it would not be fair to rouse him for this small dilemma. She might, of course, turn to Ann Blossom, who would know exactly what to do, but the suggestion resulted only in a sharply offended motion of her eyebrows. "Ann Blossom, indeed!" it expressed.

She had rolled back the wet corner of the sheet, and she replaced it now with a light shawl, wondering at the power of sleep manifested by the other six. Then she drew up a chair beside the couch.

"Now, if you will lie still and shut your eyes, I will tell you a story," she offered. Villum accepted the program, wriggling nearer to her and screwing his yellow eyelashes together. She told him a long tale with a monotonous refrain about "a rag and a tag and a long leather bag," remembered hazily from her own childhood, and he listened with a stillness so promising that she let her voice die away by degrees to silence and began cautiously to rise. Instantly two light blue slits gleamed between the parting eyelids.

"Tell it again," Villum commanded. His voice was drowsy, so she went hopefully through the droning rigmarole once more, growing desperately sleepy herself under its hypnotic repetitions. This attempt was apparently successful,

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and she had stolen as far as the foot of the stairs when a wail broke forth.

"I do not want that you go away," wept Villum.

"Oh, botheration!" she muttered. Then she stood hesitating before a possible solution. "Will you be good if I take you up into my bed?" she asked reluctantly.

His little feet instantly sought the floor, and he lifted a confiding hand to hers. So they went up the stairs together, and she could have laughed at the situation, had she not been so sleepy and so irritated.

She placed the child as far from her as possible in the wide bed, shrinking from any contact, and he fell asleep with magical instantaneousness, lying so still that she presently drifted off herself. She slept heavily this time, so heavily that she was not aroused when a soft little body curled up against her with a long breath of content. When she awoke in the early morning she was startled to find a tow head burrowed comfortably into her shoulder and a knee planted on her chest. She shrank hastily away.

"Thank goodness, they are going to-day," she exclaimed.

The house was still silent, so, lifting Villum with stealthy caution, she carried him back to his proper place, indefinitely reluctant that her har-

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bouring of him should be known. The helpless dead weight in her arms, the broad, upturned face, roused a pang of compunction, a momentary shame for her own withholding. She kissed him lightly as she laid him down.

"You are a nice baby," she admitted with a sigh.

Evidently Ann engineered seven baths that morning, for sounds of revelry and splashing began soon afterwards, interrupted at intervals by an imploring,

"Oh, darlings, there is a sick lady up-stairs — we really must be quieter!" With a frown of annoyance, Cassandra heard a definite little voice in the hall announce,

"I want mine own lady to bath me." Ann tried in vain to find out who his own lady was. "Mine own lady what tells me of the rag and the tag," was all she could elicit.

"That lady isn't here, dear," Ann assured him, and he finally consented to be bathed by her.

Cassandra did not appear until the clinking of bowls and glasses told that breakfast was in progress. The rooms had been restored to order, and the seven, variously but completely clothed, were seated about a table while Ann served them and Caspar looked on. Ann glanced up with a welcoming smile.

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"I am afraid you haven't slept much this morning, Miss Joyce," she apologized. Before Cassandra could answer, there was a note of joy from Villum. Sliding down from the dictionary that elevated him to the table, he ran across to her and took her skirts into a frank embrace.

"Here iss mine own lady!" he shouted. Cassandra flushed a little.

"Hello, Villum," she said coolly, and passed on with no further greeting than a slight touch on the tow head.

"What does he mean?" Ann wondered.

"He means that he kept me awake half the night," Cassandra explained rather shortly, turning to the dining-room where Miss Myrtle was gloomily adhering to the principle that breakfast must be served at its appointed time, even if no one was present to eat it.

Ann carried the children off to a remote part of the garden for the morning, but Cassandra had not been at work long when a sound of little boots and hurried breathing made her look up. Villum, pinker than ever from his throat to his tow hair, was beaming up at her, an interesting collection of sticks and stones tightly clasped in his arms.

"I will stay with you," he announced, dropping

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the load beside her chair. Reluctantly amused, she represented to him that he would have more fun with the other children, that he would have to be quiet here. Villum was already seated on the floor with a brief leg on either side of his treasures.

"I will be quiet, and by and by you will tell me about the rag and the tag," he asserted. So she turned back to her work, ignoring the silent little presence. Ann came presently in search of him, but his serene, "I will stay here," seemed to admit of no argument. Cassandra felt a prick of satisfaction that he would not leave her for Ann Blossom, though she offered his constancy no reward. He was still contentedly playing there when Caspar came in.

"Hello, Villum. Why aren't you with the others?" he demanded. Villum did not even look up from his building operations.

"I stay with mine own lady," was the tranquil answer. The doctor glanced mischievously at Cassandra, but her severe profile did not invite comment, so he merely announced that an omnibus was on its way to gather up the children. They were to be taken care of by the Sacred Heart Orphanage.

"Would you mind telling Ann?" he added, as the telephone summoned him.

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Cassandra went down into the garden with the message and lingered there, thinking to spare Villum the pang of parting. He had not seemed to heed the order for departure, but she had a suspicion that the moment of separation might prove overwhelming, if she were present. Poor little Deutcher! He had been rather touching that morning, amusing himself so contentedly beside her chair. She wished now that she had stopped for one more telling of the rag and the tag. It was with an honest hope that the exciting prospect of a drive behind horses would distract his mind that she hid herself in the garden.

A tree full of bright summer apples offered refreshment, and she swung herself up into its low branches. Even as she made her selection, Ann came running down the path.

"Miss Joyce, Villum wants to say good-by to you. The omnibus is waiting." She spoke with a hint of reproach, which Cassandra instantly resented.

"Say it for me. You are much better at such things than I," she returned lazily, biting into her apple. Ann was perhaps over-tired.

"But he is *crying*!" she exclaimed hotly. Cassandra picked an apple and tossed it down.

"Take him that," she said.

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The apple lay where it fell, and Ann left her without a word, though her face burned. True enough, through the summer stillness came a prolonged wail. Even after the horses had started it still sounded, rising above the rattle of the vehicle as it came nearer down the road that bordered the long garden. Cassandra tried for a moment to ignore it; then she seized a couple of apples and, slipping down from the tree, ran to a remote corner of the grounds where a gate opened on the steet. She was just in time to stop the omnibus.

"Villum!" she called, jumping up on the step. A moist, creased face was lifted from the black knees of the guardian sister; two swimming blue eyes echoed waveringly a smile of utter relief. Cassandra glanced apology at the sister, and took him into her arms.

"Now listen, Villum," she said earnestly; "if you will stop crying and be a good boy, I will come to see you to-morrow. I promise it."

"And tell about the rag and the tag?" he quavered.

"Yes, I will tell it three times." And she kissed him with tightening arms, then put the apples into his hands and jumped down to wave him out of sight. And at that very moment

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Ann Blossom, flushed and over-tired, was exclaiming with tears in her eyes,

“She hasn’t any heart — I don’t care, she hasn’t! To let him go off crying!”

“Perhaps she only hasn’t found it, Ann dear,” Caspar answered; but his face was troubled.

IV

CASSANDRA would have gone to a romantic tryst far less secretly than she slipped off for her visit to Villum the next afternoon. A faint shadow of disapproval lay between her and those who had witnessed the small boy's tragic departure, and not for worlds would she have put forth a finger to clear it away. She telephoned from a neighbouring drug store to find out the asylum's visiting hours, and went out by way of the kitchen when her day's work was over.

Villum received her with touching rapture. No doubt something in her face or voice had for him a hazy suggestion of the mother he had lost so recently: his absolute acceptance of her from the first had seemed to imply an old bond between them. She stayed an hour with him in the bare, sunny dormitory, his little chair drawn up close beside hers, the Teddy bear she had brought him clasped in a devouring embrace. Their conversation was not exciting. If her questions were very simple, he answered them; otherwise, they were placidly ignored, or disposed of with a wide,

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upward smile. By no stretch of affection could Villum be described as clever.

"How about the rag and the tag?" she suggested finally.

He rose at once and climbed into her lap as though that were an inevitable preliminary, settling himself with an assurance there was no resisting. The unconscious lordliness with which he butted her into the desired shape with head and shoulder was rather taking: she adapted herself to his needs with amused meekness, letting her arms close lightly about him, and was sorry when the children came trooping in to end their visit. An atmosphere of wholly loving admiration was a new and soothing experience.

She went again and again in the days that followed, telling herself impatiently that one must have some object for a walk. The busy sisters paid little attention to her, but, as a member of Dr. Diman's household, she found herself tacitly exempted from the rules that bound other visitors. Evidently his name was a power even here. She no longer departed by stealth, but no one questioned her movements. Presently she came to wish that Dr. Diman would find her out, and so perhaps be impelled to discover a solution for Villum's life. Thought of it troubled her increasingly. The impersonal motherhood of an

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asylum seemed a dreary fate for one so obviously born to affection; and what of his future? These new problems drove her to an abrupt question, one night when chance had left her alone with the doctor.

"What becomes of boys who grow up in orphan asylums?"

He was bent over a microscope, examining a brownish smear on a glass slide, but he straightened up to answer her.

"They go to work: a great many are placed out on farms, I believe. Some merely get jobs as best they can."

"Then they grow up day labourers, as a rule? They never have a chance to become gentlemen?" He smiled at the drastic classification.

"Not often, I'm afraid, except in cases of adoption. When people of advantages take such a child, he is very apt to grow to their level. They would pick out a promising one, of course."

A line had settled between her eyes. "You mean that they would choose the cleverest?"

"Or the most attractive and lovable, perhaps. That is what a woman with means would look for, I should say."

"Do such adoptions happen often?"

"I have known of a good many, first and last, some of them wonderfully successful." He waited

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a moment, but she asked nothing more, so he bent down over his slide. It was one of his pleasant traits to answer unexpected questions categorically, with no query as to why they had been put. "I have a most interesting bug here, if you would like to see it," he added. She complied absently; her mind was still busy with adoptions.

"When people want to adopt a child, do they go hunting through the asylums?" she went on.

"Sometimes."

"But of course, they might not look in the right place," she concluded, half to herself; then returned to the microbe under investigation. "Does that mean a deadly disease?"

"Yes. The fellow will undoubtedly die of it within the next six or eight weeks."

"Is he old?"

"No: twenty-six. He doesn't dream that there is anything serious the matter."

She turned away with a frown, but presently asked, "Shall you have to tell him?"

"Yes." He did not lift his head, but the deepened note in his voice was like an arresting hand on her shoulder, forcing her to confront for a blighting moment the realities among which he lived.

"Life is dreadful!" she exclaimed.

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"It has dreadful things in it," he admitted not uncheerfully.

"Aren't there times when you loathe your profession?"

"Yes, there are;" a smile had crept into his eyes. "When I have to hook a patient up the back, I give you my word, I'd change places with a hod-carrier."

She had to laugh. "How can you mind that, when the other things —!"

"Oh, they are nothing. I like 'em."

"You must do it rather well;" with a glance at his capable, long-fingered hands.

"Shame and rage make me bungle," he confided. "Why can't the critters come properly hooked up the front?" Cassandra wavered a moment, then drew a long sigh.

"I will do it for you!" she announced. If she expected a protest, she was disappointed: he fell on the suggestion.

"You will? God bless you, Cassandra Joyce! I am glad you're here."

"I shan't do it sympathetically," she warned him, already a little repentant of her offer. It did not occur to her — or, perhaps, to him — that that service was no more than she owed, as his assistant. "I shall just stalk in and out."

"Get the old things together, and you may

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make faces at them if you like," he returned with the levity that always startled and charmed her, coming from one whose purposes were so deeply earnest.

"Ah, it is so nice of you not to be solemn!" she exclaimed.

"Solemn!" he repeated in surprise.

"You are such a frightfully fine character, you know: at first I was always expecting you to tell me that life is real, life is earnest, or things to that effect. But you never do. You denounce once in a while," her smile was reminiscent, "but you don't exhort as you go along. I do like it."

He was frankly pleased, though he demurred. "I should preach like thunder if I thought it did any good; but I can't see that it does." He rose to put away the microscope, then stood rubbing his eyes, which looked tired. "Would it bore you horribly to read some medical stuff to me?" he asked. "Ann Blossom usually does it when my eyes are bad, but to-night she seems to have —"

"I shall be glad to," Cassandra interposed rather stiffly. He brought her a pamphlet, then threw himself down on a distant couch. A lamp stood at its head and an empty chair beside it, but she stayed where she was, her shoulders expressively squared. She began at once to read, but he broke in.

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"This is a better lamp, Miss Joyce," he observed, "and a more comfortable chair; and you won't have to read so loud. But if you would rather stay there, of course —"

"Not in the least," said Cassandra politely, and, moving to the chair beside him, she took up her suspended sentence; but again he interrupted.

"Tell me, does it bore you too awfully?" Her eyes met his, and suddenly she laughed. "Tell me," he repeated. He had laid his hand on the arm of her chair, and she let her own fall on it.

"It doesn't bore me at all. In fact, I like it. Now, don't interrupt." The instinctive clasp of their fingers resolved itself into a friendly hand-shake. Then he threw his arm across his eyes, and she turned slightly away from him. Her reading was at first perfunctory, but presently it showed arrested attention. It was she who interrupted now, and her questions were intelligent.

"Why, it is really interesting," she exclaimed when she closed the pamphlet, an hour later.

"Do you know, I believe it is!" he mocked her surprise.

Her promise in the matter of hooks came back unpleasantly to Cassandra the next afternoon when a hired carriage drew up at the verandah steps and a rustle of silk sounded fussily at the

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glass doors whereby patients entered. A strange little creature was hesitating at the threshold. Her diminutive figure, the great puff of her dull sandy hair, her rich clothes and huge hat, even the little ribboned shoes, suggested youth so strongly that the browned, wrinkled, withered age of her tiny face was shocking. Cassandra had a shrinking impression of a monkey dressed up in human garments: the fingers in tight brown kid seemed to curl on her parasol stick with a dreadful flexibility.

"Now, don't tell me Dr. Diman is out, or I shall burst into tears!" It was a gay, high voice, still sweet and reassuringly well-bred. Cassandra explained, with reserve, that he was in his office, but engaged for the present, and the little figure perched on the edge of a sleepy-hollow chair that seemed to open to a cavernous depth behind her.

"Oh, I can wait — 'waiting at the gate,'" she hummed softly. "Dr. Horatio Flint sent me." The great name — even Cassandra knew it was great — was spoken impressively. "Do you know him?"

"Not personally." Cassandra was beginning to feel an odd attraction in the queer little person. Her brown eyes — the only signs of life left in the shrivelled face — were bright with naïve friendliness.

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"A very remarkable man," was the solemn declaration, followed unexpectedly by a mischievous chuckle. "I can't bear him," she confided. "He is too cold — 'on thy cold grey stones, O Sea!' It takes affection to cure people, my dear. Affection keeps them well, too. Why, so long as my boys were with me — would you dream that I have two, great, strapping sons?"

"I should not," Cassandra admitted.

"Well, I have. They never call me anything but Flippy — my name is Philippa. It used to shock people so!" She laughed with delicate enjoyment of public horror. "I think Flippy is a darling name, far sweeter than Mama, don't you? 'I'm going to be married, M'ma, M'ma!'" she sang mockingly, her face drawn up monkeyishly over the word. "They live at the other ends of the world, but they are perfectly devoted to me, my boys." Her gaiety was suddenly quenched in harassed anxiety to be believed. "Absolutely devoted. Why, I had a letter from Carlo not four days ago. They write all the time. I could show you the letters."

"Of course they do," Cassandra assented. The little shapeless face lighted amazingly.

"Yes — the darlings: they adore their Flippy. Have you any sons? No? Then why don't you adopt one? Women can't live without children,

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my dear. I should be a perfectly well person if I weren't so lonely. 'Can't you see I'm lonely, lonely as can be?'" she sang sentimentally, then broke off with a ripple of laughter. "Don't you adore the warm-flannel smell of a very little boy?" she demanded.

Cassandra was looking at her intently. "Why don't *you* adopt a little boy?" she ventured. The readiness with which the idea was received was disconcerting.

"Oh, wouldn't that be fun! Do you suppose I could?"

Cassandra had to doubt the lastingness of so facile an enthusiasm, yet her heart had a quickened beat. "I don't see why not!"

"Oh, oh!" She rocked excitedly. "And he could go to all the matinées with me — don't you worship comic opera? I have pots of money! Only it would be so hard to find a pretty, cuddly little boy that no one wants."

"I know of a perfect darling," said Cassandra slowly.

"You do?" she started up eagerly. "Could I have him?"

"Why, I don't know: he is in an orphan asylum. You could see him."

She pirouetted lightly with a wave of her parasol. "How perfectly lovely!" Then the opening of

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the office door reduced her abruptly to dignity. "Dr. Diman? I am sent to you by Dr. Horatio Flint," she announced, and entered the office with a silken sweep.

Caspar, after a curious glance at his patient, opened the sealed letter of introduction she had brought. Across the outside was written, "Introducing Mrs. Alpheus Thorndyke." Within he read:

DEAR DIMAN, —

For the love of heaven, take this crazy old woman off my hands. There isn't anything the matter with her bodily, and she is not mad enough to be shut up — worse luck. She will take from one to five hours a day of your time, if you will let her. Your well-known fondness for freaks would not excuse passing her on to you, if I did not hope that you might know of some woman who can take charge of her under the guise of a companion. Combination of Florence Nightingale and May Irwin needed for the job. She can pay anything and is very open to suggestions — for the moment. There are sons who ought to look after her, but they don't.

Hope you will forgive me.

Yours sincerely,

HORATIO FLINT.

There was not a flaw in Caspar's respectful gravity as he slowly folded the letter and turned to his patient. She had shrunk down in her chair, one little claw over her heart.

"I am a very sick woman, Dr. Diman," she said feebly.

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During the next half-hour Cassandra mapped out a pleasant future for Villum, and found herself quite startlingly happy over his prospects. This Flippy was not perhaps a very sensible woman, but she was kind and rich, and Villum was not one to suffer for lack of intellectual opportunities. Moreover, she had brought up two sons, and so must know something about it. A course of comic opera might not be wholly advisable for a little boy, but Villum's placid sweetness had a protective quality, like a coating of varnish — he would not easily be hurt. Funny little loving person! Satisfaction swelled within her at the thought that he might find a home, and grow into a gentleman instead of a day labourer.

"I shall have done one good deed in this world, anyway," she concluded, with a thrill of pleasure for the look Dr. Diman would give her when he found out.

She turned eagerly when the office door opened, but Mrs. Thorndyke was deep in talk with the doctor, and let him put her into the waiting carriage without a glance for his assistant. Evidently she had already forgotten. In the chill of her disappointment, Cassandra would have spoken to Dr. Diman of Villum and his fate; but, unluckily, another patient claimed him.

The disappointment would not be shaken off.

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Villum's future was not her affair, she impatiently reminded herself; yet she was still sitting in idleness grieving for his lost chance when the carriage came hurrying back and the little figure in swishing silk entered with a rush.

"Whoo-oo!" she called. "What was that about the delicious baby? I almost forgot. Can I really have him?"

Cassandra laughed with relief. "Do you want to go and see him now?" she asked.

"This minute. Where is he?"

Cassandra wrote Villum's name and the address on one of Dr. Diman's professional cards, and received a fervent embrace before Flippy whirled off. She accepted the demonstration good-humouredly, feeling wonderfully pleased with life and with herself at that moment. She had meant to pay Villum a visit that afternoon, but, not wishing to intrude on his first interview with good fortune, she turned to the garden when her day's work was done.

Ann Blossom, who was weeding a bed of pansies, greeted her with a welcoming smile. Resentment, with Ann, could not outlast twenty-four hours, and if she had not condoned the heartless treatment of Villum, she had so embedded it in her general kindly faith in others that it no longer wounded. From the trellis at

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the rear of the house came the cheerful clip of Ernest's shears.

"You may pull some of my weeds, if you like," Ann offered. "It is very generous of me, for there aren't half enough."

"Do you really like doing it?" Cassandra asked, dropping on one knee and drawing out a small weed with an air of dubious experiment. Ann was curled down on the path in a bunch that must have been anatomically impossible to most persons, frankly earthy to her elbows, and she laughed at Cassandra's aloof method of gardening.

"I adore it when the weeds are thick," she explained. "It is like cleaning an awfully dusty room, or taking a bath when you have been out in good country dirt all day — there is something to show for it."

Cassandra pulled another weed, then dusted her fingers and rose to her feet. "Someway, this does not appeal to me. Perhaps the weeds are not thick enough. I will see if I like Mr. Cunningham's work any better." And she strolled on, not noticing how the girl's vivid face had clouded.

A wheelbarrow stood beside Ernest's ladder, and she seated herself in it on a cushion of honey-suckle sprays.

"I am so tired of this gardening fad," she com-

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plained. "I made some visits in England, last year, and it was nothing but bulbs and annuals and fertilizers from morning till night. It bored me almost to tears. You are not listening," she added.

"Indeed, I am. But I am wondering if I dare say something to you."

"Why not?"

The clipping had stopped and he was absently stabbing the top of the ladder with his shears. "I have been trying to confess for two days. Day before yesterday I went over to the Sacred Heart asylum with some clothes that had been sent in for the children."

Her "Oh!" showed irritation as well as enlightenment.

"I saw you there with little Villum in your lap," he went on, turning to her with a smile. "Please pardon me for finding you out — though I can't really be sorry, for I had been misjudging you."

"No, you hadn't," she insisted impatiently. "I know what you are thinking — the opening of the chestnut burr and all that. It is nothing of the kind. This was merely — an accident."

"Such accidents don't happen accidentally, Miss Joyce. I saw a great deal through that open door."

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"You saw a perfectly conventional mother-and-child tableau, a chromolithograph, a magazine cover. I refuse to let you be moved by anything so cheaply obvious." She laughed with returning good-humour, but broke off to ask quickly, "Did you tell anyone?"

"Assuredly not." He seemed shocked at the suggestion. "But you will let the others know, sooner or later?"

She smiled to herself at thought of how the tale might come out, when little Villum went gloriously away to grow up into a gentleman. "Perhaps, some day," she said.

He was troubled. "Why not now?" he urged. "You don't realize how a little false impression —"

"I don't care anything about false impressions," she interrupted. "It is my secret, you know."

"Oh, of course. But I think you are making a mistake."

"So much the better," she returned cheerfully. "There would be no sporting element in a life without mistakes. Haven't you ever made any and been glad of it — you cautious son of New England?"

His glance strayed towards the pansy bed where Ann was bending over the weeds, her face turned away from him. "Yes, one," he admitted.

"Tell me about it."

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"I made the inexcusable mistake of overworking and injuring my eyes."

She looked up curiously. "And you are glad of that?"

"I am very deeply glad of that."

"Why?" To her surprise, he flushed. For a moment he hesitated; then,

"It brought me here; and one may see very wonderful things through dark glasses, Miss Joyce," he said, with his little bow of gallantry.

"Does the man mean me?" was her startled thought. She had a frown of annoyance for the idea, yet, at the same time, a contradictory stirring of satisfaction. Any variation from the diet of husks to which she had been subjected must prove tempting. She had no intention of feeding this helpless young professor to her starved vanity; yet she permitted it, so to speak, a nibble.

"Truly?" There was a glimmer of mischief in her eyes. "If I were to put them on at this moment, what should I see?"

"If you could tell me exactly what you see without them," he began with a little laugh of excitement, settling down on the ladder as though the curtain were just going up. Ann at the other side of the lawn pulled up a pansy and flung it on her pile of weeds.

"I see a very chivalrous and kindly gentleman,"

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said Cassandra, leaning back on a stiffened arm that she might look up at him more comfortably. "How could dark glasses improve on that?"

"They might make you think that what you so graciously call chivalry and kindliness were the qualities that you most admired," was the unexpectedly acute answer. Ernest was happily aware that he had scored; he had an air of crowing down at her as he clasped one knee and rocked triumphantly back on his narrow seat.

"Ah, you *are* nice," she admitted, and her appreciative laugh carried the words across the lawn. Ann started up, as though she had suddenly remembered something, and hurried into the house. Ernest's spirits flagged somewhat after she had gone: he did not again score so neatly. Yet he was decidedly better than nothing. Cassandra stayed until she saw the doctor's carriage return, when she strolled back to the big living-room.

The same sound had evidently summoned Ann down-stairs, for she had paused, leaning on the banister, while he answered the telephone. Stray words of his conversation brought Cassandra to an abrupt halt in the doorway.

"But I don't understand. I haven't sent you anyone," he was explaining with a puzzled frown. "William Schmidt — oh, Villum, of course. But

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I have not . . . My card, you say? That is very strange. . . . Yes, a Mrs. Thorndyke was here to-day to consult me, but I certainly did not . . . What young lady? . . . Oh, I hadn't known that. Possibly she may have. I will do what I can at once, Sister Agnes. I will call you up in a few minutes." He hung up the receiver with perturbed haste. "Ann, I didn't know that you had been visiting Villum," he exclaimed.

"I haven't. I meant to see them all, but some way —"

"But Sister Agnes says —"

"I am afraid I am the guilty one," Cassandra broke in, rather nervously. Their amazement was scarcely flattering. "I am sorry, but it really was I," she insisted with a resentful motion of her eyebrows. "I have been to see him any number of times."

"Did you send Mrs. Thorndyke there to-day with one of my cards?" Caspar's look was not the one she had anticipated at the discovery of her good deed.

"I did," she said shortly, turning away as from a closed topic.

"Please explain, Miss Joyce." Caspar was making a visible effort at patience. He had had a racking day, and the picture he had seen by the trellis as he drove in had irritated and disheartened

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him — solely on Ann's account, he told himself. Under his forced temperance he was savagely glad of a legitimate cause for disapproval; and Cassandra felt it without understanding.

"Why, it was simply that Mrs. Thorndyke told me she wished to adopt a child; that she had money and was lonely. I have become rather interested in Villum, and this seemed a good chance for him, so I told her to look him up. I don't see anything so very heinous in that."

"The mistake was in using one of my cards," Caspar explained shortly, looking at his watch. "That gave her a sort of passport there, so that she was left alone with him in the visitors' room."

"And what was the harm of that, may I ask?"

"The harm of that was that she has walked off with him." He was running his eyes down a time table. "Ann, dear, will you bring me a glass of milk? I don't know when I shall get any dinner. Mrs. Thorndyke is about two-thirds insane," he added to Cassandra.

She stood aghast. "I didn't know that," she muttered. Not looking at her, he did not see the distress in her eyes; her voice sounded merely sulky.

"But — good Lord! — if you talked to her two

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minutes, how could you think she was a suitable person to bring up a child?" he exclaimed. Her eyes filled.

"She seemed — kind," she said unsteadily; "and he isn't clever, anyway — only very loving. I wanted to —" Then she put away self-defense with a quick upward motion of her head. "Is there anything I can do?"

He had turned back to the telephone. "Oh, we shall undoubtedly find him with no trouble," he said indifferently. "Thank you, Ann; you're a comfort."

Cassandra waited until he had finished talking with the asylum, then spoke out of a new and choking humility.

"Why can't I go to the city instead of you? I made the trouble — it is only fair that I should undo it."

"I am afraid you couldn't." He did not look at her, but he spoke more gently. "Tell Ernest that I may telephone for him to come and help," he added to Ann, and laid his hand for an instant on her shoulder as he went away. Cassandra turned swiftly to her own room.

"It is never right, what I do — it is never right!" she stormed.

Mrs. Thorndyke had not returned to the apartment hotel where she lived, either with or without

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Villum. Caspar had found out at the station that the two had taken the train together — they were a couple to be noted and remembered; and at the ferry he found a cab that had carried them to a children's clothing store; but there all trace of them ended. It was possible that they had gone driving in the park, and he made a futile trip to the Zoo in the hope of overtaking them there, then returned wearily to the hotel to see if dinner-time would not produce them. When it did not, he telephoned for Ernest and took the manager of the hotel into his confidence.

"You'll find her at a theatre," he prophesied, so, while Ernest tried the various hotels, he drove from box office to box office. Only the roof gardens and the frivolities of the "silly season" were running. The hot streets seemed to Caspar squalid and charmless; the vulgar imbecility of the shows in progress made him stare in wonder at the laughing, intent faces of the audiences. "I am a thousand years old!" was his silent conclusion as the last of them failed to give any signs of the queer couple he sought.

He and Ernest met by agreement at half-past nine, neither with any news. Caspar was not anxious for Villum's bodily safety; but the affair was beginning to look serious enough without that. He could not know to what degree Mrs.

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Thorndyke was irresponsible, and Dr. Flint had left town.

"There is one concert I want to try; and then we shall have to go to the police," he decided reluctantly.

Fully a thousand persons were grouped about the little tables of the huge, barnlike concert hall. Iced air was rumbling up through great funnels at the corners, iced drinks were skimming overhead on high-poised trays. Surprising social divergences marked the different tables; each group was complete in itself, and cared not who might be its neighbour. The two men made their way slowly down the length of the hall, looking about with little expectation; and yet, at the far end, they came suddenly upon an unmistakable little figure in elaborate brown silk, with a mass of hair puffed out youthfully under her huge hat, her tiny beribboned shoes tucked up on the rung of the next chair. Her face was turned away, and for a dismaying moment they thought she was alone. Then they saw a tow head resting on her lap, the broad face upturned in abysmal slumber, while the plump body, clad in a wonderful new suit, drooped helplessly over the edges of an inadequate chair seat. Two empty glasses, foamy and pink-edged, stood on their table, and the restless, withered face, as they

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approached, was almost as peaceful as Villum's. They made their appearance as casual and unstartling as possible, but her charmingly friendly eyes did not show a flicker of alarm. She greeted Dr. Diman with a laugh of delight, and extended a cordial little brown claw to Ernest.

"How jolly to meet here," she exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me you were coming over to-night?"

"We didn't know it ourselves," was Caspar's truthful answer as they drew up two vacant chairs and beckoned a waiter. "You will take soda or something with us, won't you? We have a Sahara thirst."

"Ah, you have been doing the town!" she reproved him, with joy in his obliquity.

"God knows, we have," he assented, a hand at his tired forehead.

"I knew you were nice and human — not like that stuffy old Flint," she assured him. "No, nothing more for me — we have had dozens. It has been such a spree! What do you think of my new baby?" And she gently turned the pink face toward them, her eyes alight with pride.

"I think you took him rather abruptly," Caspar observed. She chuckled with monkeyish wickedness.

"Wasn't I clever? But there is always so

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much red tape at those places, and your young lady said I could have him. So we just 'skipped by the light of the moon, the moon!'" she ended with a trill of song that drew curious glances toward her.

"Yes; but how do you think they are feeling, the people who have charge of that young man?" Caspar asked.

"Who cares? They aren't his mother. Ah, we are going to be so happy together, this little Florizel and I!" She bent over him crooningly. "Flippy's little sleepy boy! Old honey love! Don't you think Florizel is a pretty name for him?"

Caspar's eyes were warmly sorry. "What will your boys think, if you get so fond of someone else's boy?" he suggested. The next train did not go for over an hour, so he had time to try indirect methods. Her face clouded piteously.

"Ah, they are devoted to me, my boys," she assured him eagerly. "They adore their Flippy — they write all the time. You mustn't think they aren't devoted, for they are, they are!" Then her distress vanished in a ripple of laughter. "It will be such fun to tell them about their new little brother! They might even come on to see him — Carlo is only in Omaha, and he hasn't any little children of his own. Old pudding!"

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She rearranged the child's tie and collar with maternal fussiness, while the doctor met and silently answered a questioning glance from Ernest. They must not go back without Villum, even for one night.

The orchestra began its last number, and they sat in silence until it was finished and the audience had started out. Then Caspar rose.

"I am afraid you must let me take Villum back," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "You see, they are all horribly frightened about him."

"They might have known I would take good care of him!" she returned indignantly. "I guess I have brought up two great strapping sons — it's more than those old nuns ever did."

"Well, you know there is a law about kidnapping," he reminded her, and stooped to pick up the sleeping Villum. Two furious little claws fought him off.

"You shan't take him from me! You shan't!" she cried shrilly. The crowd about them paused to stare. Caspar laid a quieting hand on her shoulder, making an instant decision.

"Suppose you both come home with me," he said. "You may hold him all the way, if you like." She was easily persuaded to that, but there was another struggle before she would let anyone else carry the boy.

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"How do I know you aren't cheating me?" she wailed. "You will snatch him and run away. People are always cheating me!"

"I shall not cheat you;" his earnestness made itself felt, calming her instantly. "If you like, we will let Mr. Cunningham carry him, and you shall take his arm and mine. You can't lift Villum yourself, you know." So they went out oddly linked, not even breaking the chain when they entered a carriage. They might have caused comment anywhere else; but midsummer New York finds nothing unusual. Mrs. Thorndyke, with Florizel restored to her arms, became tranquil again, but when they stopped at the hotel for her things, Caspar had to go up-stairs with her as a proof of good faith. She brought away a pile of packages that had been delivered that evening.

"My little Florizel's outfit," she explained.

While they waited at the ferry, Ernest telephoned the news of Villum's safety, and also sent off a telegram informing Mr. Charles Thorndyke of Omaha that his mother's mental condition required the immediate presence of some member of her family. Caspar himself did not stray a foot from his charge, though his entirely casual manner gave no hint of guardianship.

"I think it is jolly to be going home with you,"

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she assured him. "I liked your house, and I adored that big, handsome young lady. Is she your wife?"

Caspar looked startled. "Oh, no; my assistant. Here is our boat," he added hastily, raising Villum to his shoulder.

Ann was the only person waiting to receive them. She had made up a bed for Villum in her own room, and, after seeing him tucked up there, Mrs. Thorndyke was easily persuaded to go to bed in a little room adjoining. When she had been made comfortable, Ann came back to Caspar, who was closing the house.

"I am so sorry I called her heartless," she said abruptly. "Miss Joyce, I mean. She told me — I made her — that she ran after Villum that day and comforted him; and she has been to see him ever since. I am so ashamed of myself!" Tears rose in her eyes.

"Don't worry," he advised; but he looked rather unhappy himself.

"I have to when I have been unfair. And, doctor dearest, I think you hurt her very much. She meant so kindly, and you were so —"

"Savage?" he helped her out.

"Oh, no — oh, never! But one just can't bear to have you unfriendly!"

"Can't one?" He laughed at her. "Well, I

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will apologize in the morning. Now go to bed, generous Ann — you look tired.”

“Her light is still lit,” Ann ventured, as she obeyed.

Late as it was, Caspar lingered a while opening letters and forgetting to read them, or absently turning over pamphlets. Pretence at occupation ended presently in frank abstraction. Then he took a sheet of paper and wrote:

DEAR CASSANDRA JOYCE, —

Please forgive my bearishness. You would if you knew how sorry I am. I have brought your Villum back safe and sound, and gorgeous in new raiment. So you won't hold it up against me, will you? One can't bear to have people unfriendly. Good night.

C. D.

He slipped this under his assistant's door, where a line of light still showed, and heard a quick step within as he went on.

V

MISS MYRTLE had not been told of Villum's disappearance — those who lived with her gradually acquired the habit of not telling her things that could give excuse for lamentation; and she had gone up-stairs before the news of his finding came. She always went to her room early, having a great many small offices that must be performed before she could fittingly go to sleep. No one ever quite found out what these were, though chance openings of the door sometimes revealed her sewing in ruchings with hunted earnestness, or washing bits of lace in the hand basin, or twisting her abundant grey hair into crimping instruments. Caspar, hearing her heavy step over his head for an hour and a half one night, finally arose and went up, between amusement and exasperation, to see what she was doing. A row of polished boots and three piece bags in wonderful order were her justification.

"I have to do these things evenings, Caspar; I don't have a minute all day," she explained in dignified resentment, and he went back outwardly routed, though secretly wondering a little if

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housekeeping were really so much more arduous than a growing and complex medical practice.

When she did give herself over to sleep, Miss Myrtle slept heavily, and so she knew nothing of the night arrivals when she came down-stairs the morning after Villum's adventure. It was her theory that, living in Caspar's house, she was always prepared for the worst; but her horrified pause at the head of the stairs showed her spirit still far from broken.

Below, on a rug, sat a tiny, weazened old woman clad in silken finery, her fading hair bushed and puffed and adorned with a white rose, her little claws doing marvellous things with jackstones, while, seated facing her, a blond little boy in a new suit looked on in heavy-eyed wonder and tried in vain to emulate. Villum had evidently accepted the fact that life has kaleidoscopic changes; that one frequently finds oneself handed over to some new guardian, or wakes up in a strange bed. Accordingly, he wasted no time in wondering, but turned all his placid attention to the matter in hand. A sneeze that threatened to lift his short legs off the rug seemed to restore to Miss Myrtle the use of her faculties. She turned and went swiftly back along the upper hall to Caspar's door, which opened at her step.

"Hello, Myrtle," he said cheerfully.

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"Caspar, *who* is that woman?" she cried. Caspar had not slept well, and was tired; for once, he let Myrtle's despair irritate him.

"A guest who will stay in my house for several days," he answered incisively. He might as well have kept his temper, for all the impression he made.

"What is the matter with her?"

"I don't think you will notice anything. She is somewhat flighty and irresponsible."

"And the child?"

"Don't you remember Villum?"

"Is he to stay, too?"

"Really, Myrtle, I can't be put through this sort of catechism every time I open my doors to anyone. I wish you would grasp the fact that you can't make me over." His most unusual sharpness finally reached her; her mouth took an injured droop.

"If you had to do the housekeeping for one week, Caspar," she was beginning, when he cut in.

"Very well; some day I will." It was not a threat, but a quiet decision. "I am too rushed just now, but very soon I shall send you away for a while, and investigate for myself this mighty business of housekeeping." And he walked coolly away, leaving his sister for once thoroughly impressed.

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Mrs. Thorndyke greeted the doctor with a friendly gaiety that struck him as artificial, and he saw, or fancied he saw, that she was tensely ready for a sudden movement as he bent down to rub an affectionate hand over Villum's head. Partly as a test, he suggested to the child that he go up and knock on the door at the head of the stairs.

"You will find someone you know there," he explained. She watched uneasily as the child toiled up baby fashion, the right leg leading.

"He might fall," she suggested, starting to her feet.

"Oh, no, he won't." Commonplace as Caspar's tone was, it conveyed a command, and she reluctantly sank down again. They heard the soft thud on the panels above, then a little crow of "Mine own lady!" before the door closed on him. Mrs. Thorndyke was so plainly unhappy that he took both her restless hands, forcing her attention.

"I want you to listen to me," he commanded. "I am going to make you a promise, and — I — shall — not — break — it. Not one thing shall be done with you or Villum without its being all talked over with you first. I am not going to cheat you or to take him away by stealth. You shall have fair warning of any change. I want

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you to believe me." Her eyes, which had been searching his face, brimmed with tears.

"Then I may keep him?" she cried.

"You may keep him here all to-day, and to-morrow, and the next day;" he promised, "then we will have another talk about it." He had already received a telegram from Mr. Charles Thorndyke saying that he was starting at once.

She darted lightly to her feet.

"'Here we go round the barbary bush,' " she sang invitingly, as Villum reappeared, clasping Cassandra by the hand. "Come and have a game, Florizel. You play, too — you're that nice, handsome young lady. Let's all play barbary bush!"

She held out her hands to Caspar and Cassandra, who gravely took them, and the three circled to her chanting about the enraptured Villum. Miss Myrtle, appearing in the doorway to announce breakfast, stood silently staring at them with an expression that called out a shout of laughter from her brother.

"'So early in the morning,'" he echoed, catching up Villum and swinging him to his shoulder. "We're coming, Myrtle." Flippy, he noticed, followed without anxiety; for the present, at least, she was reassured.

Villum had little appetite for breakfast, and

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Caspar glanced more than once at his heavy eyes and flushed cheeks. As they left the table, another violent sneeze almost heaved him off his balance.

"Too much party yesterday," Caspar commented, putting his finger into the soft neck. "I suspect that somebody has taken cold. Come here, Villum, and let your doctor overhaul you."

Villum offered himself up with his lovely trustingness, and made no objection when it was decided that he would be better off in bed.

"I will go to mine own lady's bed," he announced, tipping back his head so that all his broad pink face was upturned to Cassandra.

"What does your own lady say to that?"

"I suppose it would be easier to look after him there," she admitted indifferently. "Shall I let the Sisters know?"

"Yes, please. Say he has a cold and we will keep him for the present. You will help us take care of him, won't you, Mrs. Thorndyke?" She had been listening with quick, suspicious glances, but her face cleared brilliantly at the appeal.

"Ah, what fun we shall have!" she cried. "Won't you please *all* call me Flippy?"

"To be sure," Caspar assented, setting Villum down. "Now let Flippy get you to bed, old

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man. Your own lady will come and see you by and by."

Villum put up an obedient little hand and they went up-stairs accompanied by the jackstones and a picture book. Caspar looked after them with a suppressed laugh.

"Keeping Villum in bed won't hurt him, and it will anchor her down," he observed. "'Flippy'! It doesn't sound exactly respectful, but if she wants it —!"

"Shall you encourage her to call you Caspar?" There was an odd pleasure in using his name even indirectly.

"If she likes, poor little critter."

"Won't she make a dreadful fuss when Villum is taken away from her?"

"Her son is coming from Omaha, and I am hoping that the excitement of that will divert her."

"And if it does not?"

"Then I am afraid she will have to be unhappy;" his voice was warmly compassionate. "In any case, she is not to be tricked or cheated. Sane or insane, I am certain that always causes more friction than it saves."

"I have made a great deal of trouble," observed Cassandra, dispassionately.

"You couldn't know," he comforted her.

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Miss Snell, hearing of the new guests, firmly kept her room all the morning.

"I can't do anything with her," Ann reported, coming down with her luncheon tray. "She says that strangers make her nervous, and she is better off up there; but she doesn't seem at all happy." Caspar was leaving for a consultation, but he paused, looked at his watch, then turned to the stairs.

"I'll fix her," he assured them.

"He will;" Ann asserted to Cassandra and Ernest with a satisfied nod. "She is jealous, that's all — poor old thing."

"Jealous!" Cassandra had a frown of amazement for the word.

"Well, she hates to have him get very much interested in a new patient," Ann explained indulgently. "She can't help wanting to be first with him. It is very natural." And she took Miss Snell's cushions out to the garden in perfect confidence of the issue. Cassandra looked rather blank.

"Miss Snell, too!" she said ironically. "Really, they ought to form themselves into a club, the doctor's adorers."

"When we do, I am sure you will insist on being enrolled," Ernest declared, his boldness tempered by a smile of apology.

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"Oh, I daresay I shall be president," she retorted.

"Tell me — haven't you come to feel about him a little as we do?"

"He is, of course, unusual," she admitted dryly, after a pause.

"Unusual!" Then the school master in him checked his warm protest at her inadequacy. "And just what do you mean by unusual?"

"Rather more generous than the average." Her coolness was now deliberately provocative; she felt an acute desire to make him flare up again for the honour of his friend. And she was not disappointed. He was still earnestly holding forth on what "that man" had done for various maimed and broken lives when Caspar appeared at the stair-head, Miss Snell leaning on his arm. Ernest's abrupt halt was awkward; indeed, both looked self-conscious, separating with the effect of leaving an unfinished sentence suspended. The buggy was waiting, but, after establishing Miss Snell in the garden, Caspar came slowly back, pulling on his glove.

"Cassandra Joyce, what am I going to do with you?" he exclaimed. He was not joking; the look that met her quick upward glance was stern.

"Am I in the way?" she asked coldly, after a frightened pause.

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"Not in my way; but sometimes you frighten me for others. If you hurt my innocent little crockery pots, how can I ever forgive myself?"

She thought she understood, and a flame of resentment crossed her face. First, it was "his" Ann Blossom who was to be protected from her cruelty, now, undoubtedly, "his" Ernest Cunningham was to be shielded from her kindness.

"You never seem to trouble lest anyone might hurt me," she flashed out.

"Naturally; you are armoured by experience. But Ernest —"

"Oh, I won't hurt him," she interrupted with a gesture of exasperation. "It would bore me too unmercifully — can't you understand that?"

He did not appear wholly convinced, but he turned away. "It would be a true kindness to let Ernest understand it," he said with a suppressed sigh.

He was usually in his office at this hour, and, as her anger cooled, Cassandra watched and listened for his return with an intensity that left her fiercely impatient of the numberless little duties and interruptions of her work. It had come on her more than once of late, this restless irritation at his absence. The knowledge that he was going serenely about his business, coming hourly into close contact with lives unknown to

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her, forgetful, no doubt, of her very existence, did not make it more bearable, though it forced her to shut her teeth hard on her own folly. She might have consoled her pride by treating him coolly when he came in, but a patient was waiting and she had no opportunity.

Caspar's patients were apt to be given generous sessions, but this one, a drooping, middle-aged woman, had been closeted with him an unusually long time when he opened the door with a summoning,

"Miss Joyce — please." He had never before called her into the office, and her heart sank dismally at what might be required of her; she had meant to recall that absurd offer in regard to hooks. Realizing that it was now too late for spoken protest, she halted just within the door, looking very handsome and rebellious. The patient was slowly dragging herself up from the couch.

"I declare, I don't see what made me faint," she kept saying, with nervous sniffs at a bottle of salts. Her hat had been removed, and her hair fell in a dingy black coil from the one hair-pin that had stayed in place. She did not look at Cassandra, and, if the doctor read her attitude, he gave no sign of it.

"Miss Joyce, will you help Mrs. Harris;" he

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spoke civilly, as employer to employee, not lifting his eyes from a prescription he was writing. Her face flushed, and for a perilous moment she stood where she was; then she came slowly across the room.

"If you will just twist it up any way," murmured Mrs. Harris, who, fortunately for her peace of mind, had no attention to spare from herself. Cassandra hated physical contact, she hated this drooping, sighing woman and her unlovely hair; for the moment she almost hated Caspar. Her whole physique was insolently expressive of repugnance as she silently did what was expected of her.

"Now if you will give me my hat and gloves," sighed the unconscious Mrs. Harris. "I declare, I *don't* know what made me faint."

Cassandra complied and stalked out of the room. Caspar, after closing the door on his patient, stood with one hand clasping the back of his neck, shaken with silent laughter. She had looked so naughty, this big, handsome girl! And how she had hated it! His eyes were compassionate, even though he laughed.

"Oh, she'll learn, she'll learn," he assured himself. He did not mean to put her to another such test that day; yet, when a patient presently gave a second opportunity, it seemed well to let

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her know that her attitude had not been unobserved. The face he showed at the open door was entirely businesslike.

"Oh, Miss Joyce — I need a little help," he said pleasantly. "Will you kindly send Ann Blossom here?"

He could not know how hard he struck. She had been strung to resist a second appeal, but she was wholly unready for this unreproachful reproach, this patient turning to the ever-willing Ann Blossom. A revealing glimpse of what Ann's selflessness meant to others brought a moment of poignant humility, taking her, step by step, as far as the office door, but there the flaming sword of pride stopped her. Turning swiftly away, she went up-stairs in the direction of Ann's singing.

The open door of her own room, as she returned, showed a peaceful scene: Villum in bed and Flippy in a big chair were both asleep. She stole in and sat down by the boy, burying her hot face in the pillow.

"You are the only person who cares whether I live or die, Villum, and it's no wonder," she said sadly. "You won't when you know a little more." It was a remarkable speech from Cassandra Joyce; as remarkable as the tears on her eyelashes.

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Caspar had gone out before she went downstairs, and she scarcely saw him again that day. He was back for dinner, but had little time to eat it; he made time, however, to take Villum's temperature and to pay a brief visit to Miss Snell, who had again retreated to her room. On the way out, he stopped by Cassandra, and there was in his eyes a lurking glimmer that made her feel both resentful and suddenly light-hearted.

"Villum's cold won't amount to anything — he has the constitution of an ox; but he may be restless to-night," he began. "Suppose you have his bed put into your room; I don't want Ann Blossom to lose any sleep."

"While it doesn't matter about me?" The light-heartedness was getting the upper hand.

"While it doesn't matter about you. I think your Villum will prefer it."

"How about Flippy?"

"Oh, she is convinced now of our good faith. You won't have any trouble with her," he said comfortably, and drove away, taking Ernest with him.

Flippy did object to having her Florizel sleep so far from her, but when she understood that it was by the doctor's orders she submitted, or appeared to. After he had been tucked up for the night, she came into the living-room where

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the two girls were sitting at an ungenial distance from each other, each with a book. Her eyes were restlessly bright.

"My baby is asleep," she whispered with cautioning pantomime. "Let's go out on the verandah where we won't disturb him." Ann rose at once, but she would not be satisfied until Cassandra had put down her book and followed. Neither paid much attention to her rapid chatter, but she seemed content merely to have them with her as she flitted about the paths in the mellow light of the full moon. When she had established them on a garden bench, she suddenly started up, a finger lifted for silence.

"I thought I heard my baby," she exclaimed, and flew off to the house. Ann smiled rather timidly at her companion, whose abstracted gravity made her seem forbidding.

"I will stay with her, if you want to go back to your book," she offered. Cassandra refused with an impatient motion of her head.

"My book is as stupid as everything else," she added.

"Ah, if you only knew how really nice it is here!"

"I dare say!" Cassandra dropped her forehead into her hands and returned to her own thoughts.

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"You know, we really could give a tea for you," Ann ventured presently. "Dr. Diman knows everybody, and I'm sure he would do it. He really likes social things when he can make time for them."

Cassandra laughed, not unkindly. "'To meet my hired assistant, Miss Joyce,'" she commented. "No; teas are no remedy for my trouble. But thank you just the same." The silence this time lasted until Flippy came back. Neither noticed how long she had been gone.

"He is sound asleep, my little boy," she announced, swaying back and forth in front of them with lifted skirts and little dancing motions. "I think his old Flippy will go to bed, too; she is nearly asleep herself." She put both hands over an exaggerated yawn, her bright little eyes darting from one to the other.

"Shall I come and make you comfortable?" Ann rose as she spoke, but was hurriedly pressed down again.

"No, no; there mustn't be any noise. 'Good night, sleep tight, don't let the —'" She vanished with a soft chuckle.

The girls soon followed, and Ann, feeling that Cassandra would rather be alone, went up early to her own room. An hour later, as she was beginning to prepare for bed, a low knock sum-

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moned her to the door. Cassandra, looking startled, beckoned her away from the neighbourhood of Flippy's room.

"Villum is not in his bed," she whispered.

Ann was startled, too, then laughed reassuringly.

"Of course she has got him in with her. That is why she decoyed us into the garden." They stole back and cautiously opened Mrs. Thorn-dyke's door. It was the only small room in that huge house, and Ann's light, shining in, lighted it even to the depths of the closet; but no Villum was revealed. The narrow bed showed only the small mound made by the sleeping Flippy. After a long look, they closed the door in puzzled silence.

"Perhaps he has walked in his sleep — or she has hidden him somewhere," Ann suggested. "Did you search your room?"

"No; I didn't think of it."

They went back hopefully and investigated every corner of the big southeast chamber. Villum's bed still showed the impression of his little body and his garments hung in the closet where they had been put that morning, but there was no trace of him there or in any of the adjoining rooms. With growing alarm they searched all the empty chambers, then came back once more to the small room next to Ann's.

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"He must be here," they whispered, and again pushed open the door. The light revealed Flippy still in the same posture of deep sleep and the room, at first glance, as empty as ever. Then Cassandra's hand closed sharply on Ann's and she gave a quick jerk of her head towards the bedside. The counterpane fell almost to the floor, but just under its edge, near the head, they could see three little fingers.

They were horribly still, those little fingers; and Flippy's sleep seemed all at once to have taken on a watchful rigidity. Seeing that Ann had turned ghastly white, Cassandra closed the door again and put her into the nearest chair. Her own shaking knees forced her down on the bed.

"She has put him to sleep there," Ann stammered, her thin hands clinging to each other.

"Oh, yes; he's asleep;" Cassandra agreed with an unmistakable gasp. "We must get him away."

"If Dr. Diman were only here," Ann moaned. "Miss Myrtle wouldn't be any use."

"No; but Hattie might."

"It is her evening out. She's never back till late. You didn't see the fingers move at all, did you?"

"No. And she isn't asleep, I am sure. She

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is watching." They turned pale, listening faces towards the closed door, but within there was no sound. Cassandra took herself in hand. "We can't let him sleep there, with his cold," she announced firmly. "Suppose we were to cry fire, and so get her out of her room long enough to — to take him?"

Ann shook her head. "That would be cheating her. It is just because she has been treated that way so often that she won't trust us now."

"Then what can we do?"

Ann thought a moment, then rose tremblingly. "I'll try, if you will stay near me," she whispered. Cassandra nodded, and was surprised at the girl's sudden courage as she boldly threw open the door.

"Oh, Mrs. Thorndyke!" she called, her voice troubled but steady. "I hate to disturb you, but we have lost little Villum, and we are so frightened." Flippy's eyes remained tightly shut, though her hands moved. "Can't you help us find him?" Ann begged. "It will be so bad for his poor cold, and we're so frightened and unhappy." She ended with a wholly genuine sob. Flippy's eyes, bright with mischief, suddenly opened on them; two little claws shot out and caught at the counterpane.

"Peek-a-boo!" she cried, and lifted it on a

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peaceful, deep-breathing Villum, banked with cushions and rolled like an Eskimo in rugs.

"Oh, Flippy, how could you!" Ann cried, dropping on her knees, the tears still running down her cheeks. Flippy pouted.

"I don't see the harm. You said I could have him," she added defiantly at Cassandra.

"Haven't you had him all day?" was the reproachful answer. "And you were promised him all to-morrow. It was not kind." Flippy affected to whimper.

"I made him perfectly comfortable," she complained.

"But it was not doing what Dr. Diman said," interposed Ann. "You must put on your wrapper and help us take him back to bed." Somewhat to their surprise, Flippy yielded, following meekly beside Cassandra, who had lifted the boy without arousing him. They let her help to settle him in his bed, and then Ann, with one of her sympathetic inspirations, suggested that she take Villum's little shoes back with her. Flippy was charmed with the idea, and returned to put them under her pillow.

"Now he can't get out of the house," she rejoiced. "Though I really don't think you people would cheat me," she added wistfully; "not the way the others have."

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"We truly won't," Ann promised, closing the door on her with a sigh of weariness and relief.

Villum, sound sleep, showed tightly screwed eyelids with yellow lashes appealingly upcurled, and a duckling babyishness of outline. Before putting out her light, Cassandra leaned on one elbow to look down at him. It was surprisingly pleasant to have him there. The defencelessness of him — the helpless, rounded chin and curled hands — combined with the evening's fright to stir new and unsuspected depths of feeling. She bent nearer to him, one arm across his body, her eyes darkened with an emotion that was half warmth, half pain. Then she turned away with a shrug and put out the light.

"They *are* nice," she admitted casually, as though someone had caught her.

Hours later, in the deepest darkness of the night, she was startled out of sleep by a sense of something moving. She shot out a frightened hand, and encountered the soft curve of a babyish cheek. A little body, clambering blindly in the dark, found her and curled up against her with a long breath of content. For an instant she lay rigid, all her imperious dread of contact aroused. Then, as a little hand curled into her neck, the restraint vanished. Her arms went out to him and she drew him close, all the soft length

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of him, pressing her lips against his hair and forehead. Tears sprang into her eyes.

"Oh, one does want them!" she cried to herself, frightened at the sudden revelation, but wonderfully glad.

The morning brought Mr. and Mrs. Charles Thorndyke — for Carlo's wife came with him. The two suggested irresistibly a large, ornamental float, heading a procession, and its little, dark-browed, practical steam attendant. After five minutes of Carlo's decorative passivity, Caspar, who had met them in the city, settled down comfortably to Mrs. Carlo, greatly encouraged by her power of active listening. Her husband made occasional comments to show that he understood, but seemed equally interested in trying to see the twisted point of his florid moustache; her busy-minded silence was far more convincing. When they left the train she brought out her conclusion:

"We'll just have to take her home with us. I've been telling Carlo for two years that someone ought to look out for her," she added.

"I am afraid Flippy will be bored in Omaha," Carlo observed resignedly.

"I guess you're more afraid you'll be," was the matter-of-fact response. Her tone showed

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neither resentment nor humour, and he answered as dispassionately.

"Well, perhaps."

"You must take her quickly, so that the excitement will carry her over the separation from the little boy," Caspar suggested. "That is why I have not told her you were coming: I wanted the full effect of it to divert her."

Mrs. Carlo considered. "Is he a nice little boy?" she asked presently.

"Very lovable."

"Orphan, you say." And she once more relapsed into thought.

↳ Mrs. Thorndyke and Villum sat on the floor of the verandah, playing jackstones. Caspar drove quickly past with his guests, returning alone.

"Flippy, whom would you like best to see in all the world?" he began. She glanced bewilderedly from him to Villum.

"My baby is right here," she explained.

"But you once had other babies, who are grown men now. What if Carlo came?"

She sprang up. "Oh, do you think he will?" she cried. "My boys can't come often, but they do love their Flippy, truly. They never forget me!"

"Of course not. And Carlo has come all the

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way from Omaha to see you," he added, as steps sounded on the gravel.

Carlo had stopped short, staring at the elaborately youthful figure, the withered little old face, with something nearer to an expression than Caspar had yet seen. For a moment he was passive under his mother's passionate embrace; then his arms took her quite off the ground.

"Why, you poor little old Flip!" he muttered.

Mrs. Carlo, after a composed glance at her mother-in-law, had turned her business-like attention on Villum. Out of the innocence of his friendly heart, with no faintest intuition that his whole future was at stake, he offered a tentative smile to this new lady. She returned it generously, then gave Caspar a decisive nod.

"He's real cute," she said affirmatively. Caspar read her idea, and responded warmly.

"You couldn't find a dearer little boy," he said, "if that is what you want."

"It's what I want; and Carlo never objects to anything. He's too lazy," was the tranquil answer, as she turned to greet Mrs. Thorndyke. Her "Well, mother," was kindly, if unemotional. Cassandra's mistake was, after all, bearing good fruit.

And so it came about that when the Thorndykes went West again, a placid little blond boy,

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as well as an erratic mother, went with them. Villum took the separation from Cassandra calmly this time; no doubt he supposed that he might any day wake up to find himself in her bed. It was she who felt an unconfessed but dragging weight of loneliness.

VI

SEVERAL hard, bright, uninviting days had swept by on a high wind, days of glaring blue and white, made doubly depressing by abrupt intervals of shadow when a cloud mass was spun across the sun; charmless days, holding out no temptations to dreamers. Then the wind fell away and out of a magic stillness came a morning tinted and softly blurred like an opal, milky warm, odorous of earth and grass, a day when every breath seemed to draw in with it some miraculous promise of desires fulfilled.

Caspar sat tipped back at his desk, his morning mail before him, his eyes turned to the open door. In the great hall beyond Cassandra was working with a severe determination that he found rather touching. She could do her work remarkably well when she chose, having that invaluable quality called "head" as well as capable hands; and she was evidently trying hard, this idyllic morning. Her splendid young body was never crushed down into her tasks, as Ann's was; she merely bent towards them, her gener-

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ous shoulders as easily straight as when she walked: her head drooped so little that her down-cast eyes were nearly covered by their lids. She had no restless, nervous movements, even when most impatient, and now, except for her swiftly moving hand, she sat with a natural stillness that deepened the impression of strength. The doctor drew his eyes away with an impulse to a sigh, abruptly quenched, and turned to his letters; but the quality of the morning was like a summons from the open window. Presently he let his pen drop and took up his engagement pad. The day showed nothing that could not be put off, and he rose to his feet with sudden buoyancy.

"I have got to take a holiday," he declared. Cassandra looked up with the derisive, one-sided smile he had learned to watch for.

"I never heard you say that before!"

"There is something the matter; I can't work. I want to take the next train up to the lake and paddle all day in a canoe. What do you say?" Her eyes fell again.

"I don't see why you shouldn't," she said dispassionately, hiding a riotous hope.

"Ah, but I am inviting you."

"I accept with great pleasure."

"That's good. I will ask Myrtle to put us up

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a lunch. You won't expect me to wear good clothes, will you?"

Some of her secret joy slipped out disguised as malice. "I didn't know you had any," she said. He laughed, but returned the attack.

"Oh, I know you! You would rather be paddled by an escaped convict in outing flannels than by an archangel in his suspenders. Wouldn't you, now?"

"Vastly. I shall look just as handsome as possible, myself."

"I have no quarrel with that!" He glanced at his watch. "Can you achieve it in twenty minutes?"

"Easily."

"Very well, then. We will take a car — that is quicker." He turned to the door, then paused. "I wonder if Ann wouldn't like to come?"

The secret exultation dropped with crashing suddenness. She had to stoop for a stray bit of paper, to hide the angry flame in her cheeks.

"I am afraid Miss Blossom has gone up to town," she said coolly. "Perhaps you can catch her at the station if you hurry."

"Oh, no. She will have a better time buying shoestrings and exchanging pearl buttons." He smiled indulgently. "Ann isn't any too keen on little boats, anyway." And he went off hum-

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ming to make his preparations. Cassandra looked after him with a hot sigh of exasperation; then she forgave him and ran up-stairs.

The exhilaration came back as she dressed. She tried to scoff at herself for being so happy — “like a tenement child with a day in the country!” — but her satire ended in a laugh as she pinned on a big white hat and caught up her gloves. She found Caspar cutting sandwiches while Miss Myrtle hunted wildly for the bread knife and lamented that there was not time to do it properly. They had the basket packed by the time the knife was found, and hurried away unfeelingly from her prophecies of rain.

“Though it may,” Caspar admitted, and turned back from the gate for an umbrella. When he reappeared, some new idea had sobered his step.

“See here,” he began, “there’s Miss Snell sitting all alone in the garden, with no Ann to cheer her. Suppose we ask her to ride up on the train with us? The excursion will do her good, and she can come right back on the same train: she wouldn’t be equal to boating. What do you say?”

“Oh, certainly — that will be enchanting!” Cassandra spoke with hollow geniality. “And I will run round to the orphan asylum and gather

half a dozen children; they will add enormously. And couldn't we stop at the Old Ladies' Home for a few —"

"Oh, come!" He walked on impatiently. "I was not proposing it for my pleasure," he deigned to explain, rather stiffly.

"Nor for mine, either, I suppose," she commented, as they signalled a car.

The situation might have proved difficult but for a delay and the conductor's subsequent doubt of their making their train, which furnished excuse for forgetting the momentary encounter. Smothered railing at leisurely passengers who persisted in mounting and dismounting brought them in complete good humour to the station platform just in time. Cassandra paused on the car steps for a mischievous glance back.

"We are actually off!" she exclaimed in exaggerated relief.

"Oh, I thought we should catch it," said Caspar, not understanding.

"Oh, yes. But I was so afraid you would bring that fat old lady in the soiled red flannel blouse. And when the lame boy with the bandaged head got on — well, I still don't see how you resisted him!"

Personal attack always afforded Caspar deep enjoyment. His laugh under it had a startled

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quality that was one of her small daily triumphs; there was an inexplicable delight in holding him up to his own surprised and amused gaze.

"I suppose I look a tremendous crank to you," he admitted as they crunched down the cindery aisle. It was a shabby little way train with seats of disreputable red velvet, yet it had for Cassandra an air subtly festive. The very smell of smoke and dust was stimulating. She took her seat with a happy sense of possession; not even a telephone could reach them now.

"Well, Diman! Of all the luck! Just as I was wishing—" One of the half dozen passengers had started up, arresting Caspar in the aisle. He was evidently a physician: Cassandra caught fragmentary references to a consultation and "extraordinary developments" through the rattle of the train. The two stood talking for several minutes with growing absorption, then automatically moved into the empty seat across the aisle. Ten minutes went by, and still Caspar had not spared so much as a glance for his rightful companion. He seemed to be giving advice to the younger man, who listened with eager interest.

Having stayed so long, it was fortunate that he stayed longer, for Cassandra's spirit was making a difficult journey from mortification, through

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hot wrath to a bewildered humility. She knew that it was funny, this attempt to picnic with an incorrigible humanitarian, but she could not laugh yet. Out of the final humility rose a sickening suspicion. She had congratulated him on getting away without attendant derelicts; but, after all, had he? What was she? Had he not asked her in the same spirit of kindness that suggested Miss Snell?

"Why not? I am nothing to him personally. He is simply sorry," was her abject conclusion as the trip came to an end.

"You could not go with me, of course," said the younger man; and Cassandra had reached so low a point that she was breathlessly grateful for Caspar's prompt,

"I am afraid not. Let me know how it comes out," he added, gathering up basket and umbrella. "Here we are, Miss Joyce."

The lake lay before them in enchanted stillness, opal blue, with misty edges. Cassandra took her place on the cushions in passive silence, while Caspar threw off coat and hat and broke the mirroring surface with a long stroke of the paddle. The canoe shot away from the landing and for several minutes there was no sound but the drip of water. Then the paddle stopped and Cassandra, glancing up, met a look of friendly inquiry.

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"Well?" he queried. She tried to smile.

"Well?" she returned.

"Why aren't you as happy as I am?"

Her impulse to honest speech could never long be kept under. "I think I was feeling a little lonely," she admitted. He looked disconcerted.

"I don't care for that!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, not now — but on the train."

"Oh! That was rather rude of me;" with surprised contrition; "but Barker had such a confoundedly interesting case on —"

"It wasn't that it was rude," she interrupted.

"What hurt was that it was middle-aged."

"Middle-aged!" She had obviously hit there.

"Girl, do you know how old I am?"

"What does it matter? To take a pretty lady out for the day," she smiled faint apology for the phrase, "and then desert her at the first chance — that is middle-aged. And I am young, you see. So it made you seem — oh, rather remote, that is all."

She felt a pang of compunction when she saw how his face had clouded, but she told herself hotly that it was right, that he ought to understand. After a difficult silence, he spoke with obvious effort.

"The curious thing is that I was not — remote at all. I was conscious of you every moment:

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you were a pleasant fact right there that I could turn to the instant business was done. I was so thoroughly — with you, it never occurred to me that you would not know it."

"Now you make me ashamed."

"Well, I think you should be."

"Ah, but it is so dreadful to feel oneself a dervish, a case," she burst out. "You see, I have always gone to things in the character of a proud beauty — and in my world that meant importance."

"Even in mine it has its place," he said dryly. She went on without heeding him.

"And then to feel suddenly that you are taken somewhere out of kindness, to give you an outing and a good time: that your presence isn't a favour to others, but a piece of good luck for you — can't you see how that would hurt? — if you were horrid and spoiled, like me?"

He laughed out at the earnestness of the final appeal.

"It needn't," he assured her. "I solemnly promise that I will never take you anywhere out of benevolence. I certainly had no such idea in asking you to-day."

"Then it is all right," she said, holding out her hand. "Isn't it?" she added, as though she felt some lack of response in his ready clasp.

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"Yes — for this time;" his fingers tightened before they released hers. "But you proud beauties have so many ways of being hurt. I shall wound you again and again, never meaning to, never knowing it unless you tell me."

"Well, I shall be rather apt to let you know," she said cheerfully, and the shadow passed, leaving them on a new footing of intimacy and understanding.

"Middle-aged!" He went back to it with humorous resentment. "That was a nice word to hand a man who is barely forty!" She looked him over with eyes that missed nothing of his muscular vigour, his alert poise on the little seat, the vitality that underlay the sunny warmth of his contented eyes; but she would not take it back.

"You are," she insisted. It was a challenge, and he met it squarely.

"Some day I may show you that I am not." There was an unexpected significance in his voice that set her nerves vibrating, but she held bravely to her attack and the note of amusement.

"You would have to do something very rash, very selfish and unwise, to convince me," she warned him.

"Something that middle age might consider rash, selfish, and unwise," he corrected her with

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a deepening smile that inexplicably brought a flush to her cheeks. "Youth is always right from its own point of view. Well, I may yet, Cassandra Joyce!" And he threw back his head with a laugh so boyishly mischievous that she started up in intolerable confusion.

"I want to paddle," she announced abruptly. He would not let her change her seat until he had brought them close to the bank.

"Young as I am, I am not rash about canoes," he assured her, and kept a steadying hand on a low branch while she moved into the bow.

With two paddles, the boat was presently going at a new pace. They had left the drowsy green shores, and were cutting a furrow down a pale expanse so glassily still that they almost looked to see it splinter against the sharp bow. To Cassandra it was a race between them, a boastful endurance race. Her eyes were fixed straight ahead, gravely steady, her mouth was smileless; only the exultant plunge of her bared arm showed her excitement. The minutes swung by, fifteen, twenty of them, but there was no relaxing of the hot pace. She would have kept it up till she fell, but at last Caspar cried out for quarter, letting his paddle drop. She turned a flushed, triumphant face back at him.

"Oh, tenderfoot!"

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"Not at all. I could have gone on indefinitely if it had been necessary. But why broil ourselves for no purpose?"

She dipped her hand reflectively into the water. "Perhaps, at your age, it is better not," she assented.

He met it gravely this time.

"Did I seem elderly to you when I first met you at Miss Joyce's?" he asked.

"Why, I don't know. You were the doctor to me, then. I had not begun to think of you as a man at all." He smiled to himself at the implied admission.

"What a wretched time that was for you!"

"How did I seem to you?"

"Very brave and very ignorant. But I had no idea what a tight place you were in. You were so well dressed and so — cocksure generally, it didn't occur to me until that day after the funeral that you might be in money difficulties."

They were drifting along the banks, and she had laid her paddle across her knees, half turning her head towards him.

"What made you think it then?"

"Do you remember, I happened to say to you, 'What shall you do now?' 'I don't know,' you said, and it suddenly came to me that you were frightened."

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"I can assure you, I was!"

"But why you had hidden it so from me —! You tried to dodge me even then, but, thank heaven, I never did mind rushing in."

"I have noticed that."

"Better be grateful for it, young woman! Do you remember how I finally cornered you with, 'Just how much money have you got in the world?' "

"And I said, 'Twenty dollars.'"

"Yes; as coolly as if it were twenty thousand. But your eyes filled."

"That isn't the only time you have made me cry."

"Poor dear! But that was the only time you hated me for it, wasn't it? You wouldn't lower your eyes or look away. You had a mighty pride, Cassandra."

"Have," she corrected him.

"It isn't as bad as it was."

"I suppose I was just 'a case' to you, as you were just 'the doctor' to me."

"I don't know — I think you were always more than that to me." His tone was quite matter-of-fact. "I wonder if it isn't lunch time?"

They made the joyful discovery that it was long past lunch time, and headed for a hidden cove where Caspar remembered a spring of pure water,

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as well as a sandy beach and a pine grove. So effectually was it hidden from the lake that they were well inside before they discovered that a picnic party of four already held possession. Before they could sheer off again, an excited voice had hailed them. A stout little middle-aged woman in an ancient pink silk blouse and a still older blue serge skirt had run down to the water's edge, signalling violently with a ginger beer bottle.

"Dr. Diman!" she cried. At the name three young girls started up, dropping plates and cups.

"Dr. *Diman!*" they repeated in ecstatic welcome.

With a startled, "Upon my word!" Caspar beached the canoe and stepped past Cassandra to let his hands be taken by as many claimants as could get possession.

"Mrs. Honeywell!" His welcome was as hearty as theirs. "And I was wondering about you only yesterday. What luck!"

"My goodness gracious! To go on a picnic and find you!" she marvelled. She had a high, metallic voice that sawed on sensitive eardrums, but her face, round and innocently rosy under a wispy attempt at a pompadour, was all warmth and softness.

"It is the first I have had since you left us.

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How are you? Why haven't you sent me a line now and then?"

"Too well — nothing to say," she laughed; then took his hands again, her face sobering. "But I remember, every morning and every night, who I owe it to," she added.

He was fairly shining down on her. "You owe the greater part of it to yourself, my dear friend! It's splendid to see you like this. Dear me, look at these great creatures — how they have grown!"

"Whales, aren't they," assented their mother proudly. "We had a horse and surrey lent us for the day, so off we had to come. Of course you are going to lunch with us — we can't let you go."

He turned back to Cassandra, two of the girls clinging to his arms.

"Miss Joyce, you must come and meet Mrs. Honeywell," he said, the pleasure of the encounter still lighting his face. "And these are the three young Honeywells — Tom, Dick, and Harry."

A burst of girlish laughter and an "Oh, Dr. Diman!" greeted this. Cassandra, bravely hiding her dismay, had left the canoe to meet Mrs. Honeywell's impetuous advance.

"Oh, yes, I've heard all about Miss Joyce," was the disconcerting greeting. "Isn't it all too perfectly lovely, and just exactly like him?"

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Cassandra assented, bewildered, but making a soul-wrenching effort at cordiality; and wondering in a detached aside how so harsh a voice could coexist with eyes of such beaming warmth.

"You're in the loveliest hands God ever made," Mrs. Honeywell went on impressively as the girls seized on Caspar's attention. "I don't suppose you've heard about me, Miss Joyce, but I tried to have melancholia five years ago — you won't believe it of a fat, jolly-looking thing like me, but I did — and he just wouldn't let me. I lived in his house all winter, with the girls at the best school money could find — his money, mind you! And we just think there's nobody like him on this earth."

"I don't wonder," said Cassandra, reluctant lips driven to a smile.

"He's so busy, I never like to bother him, but it's perfectly great, seeing him like this. Doctor, I'm telling Miss Joyce that I feel as if I'd had a big, fat Christmas present, coming on you this way. We've got loads of sandwiches —"

"So have we," interposed Caspar, getting out the basket as though their staying was a matter of course. Cassandra lingered by the canoe under the pretext of pulling it farther up the beach. She was not angry, this time; only grievously, childishly disappointed. All the

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morning the prospect of their lunch hour, of lounging on the warm ground in the intimacy of the little feast, had stood out as the bright goal of the day. They might clash before, or even after, but that hour must surely be all happiness. And now the precious time had been handed over to a gushing woman and three noisy girls — and he was just as content. He did not even notice that she had stayed behind. It was at that point in her silent lament that his voice broke in.

“Come, Miss Joyce, or your sandwiches will get cold,” he called, rousing a chorus of giggles. He was standing with a hand out to pull her up the bank, and his eyes looked straight down into hers, a look so comprehending and warm that she had to forgive it for being also masterful and merry. It offered no apology, but it said, “I know!” and with that she was suddenly soothed and cheered. She would not admit that she had understood, but she took her seat with a good grace, and the girls, who also knew her story, found her “perfectly grand.” Nevertheless, it was a long meal to her, and it might have been longer but for a sudden darkening of the sunlight. Looking out from under their pines, they discovered that the misty edges of the sky were gathering into puffy masses with mischief in

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their shining depths. Miss Myrtle's rain began to look only too plausible. Mrs. Honeywell longed to drive them to the station, as the surrey had a top, and they could all squeeze in as well as not, but Caspar resisted with easy firmness, and in a blessedly short time they were seated in the canoe, the three young Honeywells clustered to push it off, and their mother still pouring out her voluble affection from the bank.

"Well, I do declare, Doctor, it's been just the loveliest thing that ever happened! The girls and I'll talk about it for weeks. But if you get wet going back, I'll never forgive myself, never. Don't you think you'd better change your mind —"

But the canoe was already backing about. A moment later, with good-bys and wavings, they had slipped out into the silence of the lake. Caspar looked about the darkened horizon, then settled himself on his seat with an air of getting down to business.

"Now we've got to *paddle*, my dear girl," he said, and the little phrase wiped out all the weary impatience of the past hour and a half. Cassandra bent to her work without answering: the boat seemed full of a peace and harmony that needed no words.

The mirror had been broken by schools of brisk

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ripples that presently leaped up into waves. The two were racing again, both together now against the coming thunderstorm. Once or twice, as the waves increased under the squally bursts of wind, Caspar called out, "Shall we land?" but received a silent shake of the head for answer. For half an hour they plunged through a sea of white caps that would have meant disaster to less steady hands and heads. Figures at the boat-house gathered to watch them, and a row-boat was got ready, but the canoe came on so strongly and fearlessly that it was not sent out. Just as a peal of thunder shook the first great drops out of the clouds, their paddles were lifted to grip the landing.

Cassandra sprang out with little help from the admiring hands held down to her.

"Wasn't it splendid," she exclaimed, as they ran up the steep bank to the station.

"You were splendid," he echoed. "I should not have dared to try it with any other woman I know. But your poor skirt!"

She laughed at her drenched linen. "We only shipped three or four waves, but of course I got them," she said cheerfully. "Oh, listen!"

It was impossible to do anything but listen for the next half hour: all creation seemed to be smashing under the great rolls, and the rain on

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the roof was in itself a lesser thunder. Dr. Di-man paced about station and platform with a touch of restlessness, but Cassandra, on the hacked wooden bench, was very still. All day she had been longing to go back to some words of the morning, to take them out and feel again the thrill of their possible meaning. "Something that middle age might consider rash, selfish, and unwise;" and then his mischievous laughter. What could it have meant? And why at that moment had the little boat seemed to possess veins with running sap in them — currents of unseen life? "I may yet, Cassandra Joyce;" and then, "You were always more than that to me:" — the words stirred, warmed, and disheartened her in turn as she sat staring into them. On the train going back they still held half her thoughts.

At their station they found Ann Blossom just back from town with her buttons and shoestrings, and waiting for the dwindling rain to cease. The joy of her amazed welcome seemed disproportionate to a day's separation; yet the shining of her happy face was reflected in Caspar's.

"That is the rash, youthful thing — he will make love to Ann Blossom," thought Cassandra, as she followed them to a carriage. She was suddenly conscious that she was tired, and that her skirts were wet.

VII

CASPAR'S holiday was over when they reached the house. Important messages were demanding answers, and an impatient motor was waiting to whirl him away to a consultation. It was eight o'clock before he reappeared, tired and hungry. The dinner had not been of a sort to warm up happily. He looked dubiously at the plates Miss Myrtle set before him, then, for the first time in years, made a protest.

"Aren't there some chops or a steak I could have, Myrtle? This isn't exactly tempting — and I'm dog tired."

"Why, of course there isn't, Caspar. We can't keep things like a hotel. Besides, Ronsard has gone out and Hattie is washing up."

"Oh, well!" He went at his shrivelled dinner with a resignation that his sister resented.

"It is so like a man, to expect a house to run like a club," she lamented. "If you had to do the housekeeping for a while —"

"Very well, I will," he interrupted with an unexpected touch of irritability. "I have been meaning to for some time. You can go to Aunt

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Jennie's the first thing in the morning; and I will run the house for a week."

"But, Caspar —"

"I don't want to discuss it. I intend to find out if housekeeping is as overwhelming a task as you women seem to think." He was outwardly amiable again, but inflexible. "Pack up this evening and I will send you over right after breakfast."

"But, *Caspar* —"

"Now, Myrtle, you have been bewailing your hard lot for ten years. It is time I took hold and investigated. Do you know Aunt Jennie's number?" He left his dinner to telephone, and Miss Myrtle went agitatedly to collect her belongings. For half the night she could be heard, mysteriously occupied with the packing of her bag. In the morning she would have devoted an hour or two to final orders, but her brother interrupted and firmly saw her off.

"You'll have to tell everything to Hattie; that Frenchman is no earthly use," was her final warning, called over the carriage wheel.

Caspar came back with an air of having cleared the decks for action, and sought his assistant.

"I want some advice," he began, seating himself on the arm of the nearest chair. "You know I am to do the housekeeping this week."

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"Shan't I do it for you?"

"No; I mean to find out just how hard it is to order three meals a day and keep a few people comfortable. I can't believe that it need take all an able-bodied person's time. Now don't you think I could give Hattie a written menu for the day's meals every morning? I've made one out for to-day."

"Of course. And make her give you a list of just what is needed."

"That is a good idea. Why, this is going to be very easy. I prophesy that it won't take me fifteen minutes a day." And he strode off to the kitchen.

Hattie heard of the new arrangement in unresponsive silence. Taking the carefully written menu between thumb and forefinger, she read it distantly.

"Miss Myrtle always has boiled mutton for Tuesdays," was her only comment.

"Always? Every Tuesday?"

"I been here five years and she ain't missed it once."

"Odd I should not have noticed it!" Hattie obviously did not think it odd; her expression implied that that was just what she should have expected. "Do we have regular things on other days, too?"

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"Every day but Saturday; and then it's always chops or steak."

"That is very surprising. I don't care for the idea at all. Is there any objection to having chickens to-night?"

"Can't have them Wednesday, then."

"But I don't wish them Wednesday!" He was beginning to find Hattie trying. "Now I want you to make a list of everything the house needs for to-day and bring it to me in fifteen minutes. If anything is forgotten, it will have to go over till to-morrow." And he retreated hastily to his office.

On the desk lay a pile of rough notes, materials for an address, to be delivered that evening, and for which his engagement pad allowed him only the next two out of the coming eleven hours. He had had just time to become wholly immersed in his subject when a thump on the door heralded Hattie.

"Ice man," she announced.

"What?" He looked up bewilderedly.

"Ice man. How much ice do you want?" she condescended to explain.

"How much? Why, the usual quantity, I suppose. How much does my sister order?"

"According to what's left in the refrigerator."

"Well, what is left?"

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"Ain't none there at all."

"Then get enough! Use your intelligence, Hattie!"

"Do you mean one hundred pounds or fifty?" she asked unmoved.

"You'd better get a hundred, hadn't you?"

"Refrigerator won't hold but seventy-five."

"Good Lord, woman! Then get seventy-five."

"Seventy-five, then," said Hattie, and stumped away.

"I begin to feel for Myrtle," Caspar murmured, returning to his address.

Five minutes later she was back. "Garbage man," she stated baldly.

"Well?" he demanded with suspended pen.

"He's here."

"What of it?"

"Ain't you going to pay him? It's the day."

"Oh, I see." He pulled out some money with suppressed impatience. "Have you got that list ready? I don't want to be interrupted again."

She made no answer, but presently returned with a slip of paper. His lips twitched over the spelling.

"Very well. Order those things yourself when the boy comes," he said, returning the list. She took it reluctantly.

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"You'll not see him yourself?"

"There is no need."

"Well." There was a world of objection in her tone, but she gave no further expression to it. For half an hour he wrote undisturbed; then he was rudely dragged from his happy absorption by the announcement,

"He says chickens is twenty-eight cents." The news had to be repeated before it conveyed any meaning to him.

"Twenty-eight cents apiece?" he inquired. Her look was almost pitying.

"Twenty-eight cents a pound."

"I see. Is that very high?"

"When they're over twenty-five cents, Miss Myrtle buys fowl and has a fricasee."

"Oh, I think twenty-eight cents won't ruin us;" and he resumed his pen.

"He's got nice mutton, if you'd like a boiled leg," Hattie observed.

"We will have just what I have ordered, Hattie." His voice had an edge, and she turned stolidly away, but paused to add,

"The man's come to look at the range. Will you talk to him?"

"I am too busy. If it is out of order, tell him to fix it." And he went to work with a finality that even Hattie had to respect. Nevertheless,

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she was back four times in the next hour. When his most difficult passage was broken in on to find seven cents change for the rags and bottles man, he ran wild fingers into his hair and went desperately to Cassandra.

"It's awful!" he burst forth. "How do women stand it? I thought I should teach Myrtle a lesson, but — great goodness! Get her back this afternoon, will you — with my humblest apologies? Only she ought to have a rest, poor soul — she has earned it."

She laughed at him, finding his despair very endearing. "It need not be half so bad as it is," she explained. "Miss Myrtle has no system. Why don't you let me do it for you?"

He was sorely tempted, but he resisted. "No; I must straighten it out myself, and I must prove that it need not be so hard, or Myrtle will bully me for the rest of my days. I'll manage some way — only I *won't* have boiled mutton for dinner every Tuesday."

"You shan't," she assured him with an indulgence that brought their eyes together.

"None the worse for yesterday?" he asked.

"Much the better, thank you."

"Shall we do it again some day?"

She was very glad, but she smiled mockingly. "Two holidays in one year! You!"

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"I shall need two a week if I have many more such mornings. How women ever manage to do anything else —"

"Ice pick's broke." Hattie launched the information from the doorway without even the cough of preface and apology. Caspar turned on her.

"Hattie, if the house falls down, don't you come to me again this morning! I have given orders enough to run a hotel — do the best you can and leave me in peace!" And he sternly shut the door of his office on household affairs.

Hattie retreated without comment, and was not again heard from until they were summoned to the luncheon table. An empty butter dish demanded explanation.

"Butter'n eggs man didn't come;" her detachment was perfect.

"What does Miss Myrtle do when he doesn't come?" demanded her employer.

"He always does come. Ain't never failed before."

"Are there no grocery stores in this town?"

"I hadn't any orders to leave my work and go get it." Hattie's tone was not insolent; merely matter-of-fact.

"A lunch with no butter —" began Miss Snell in unhappy protest. Ann sprang up.

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"Go slowly, all of you," she called gaily, and ran out. In less than ten minutes she was back with a fresh pat, and Miss Snell, who had sat with her hands folded in exaggerated patience, because one could not begin without butter, allowed herself to be appeased. But Caspar's serenity was still a little clouded when they rose from the table.

"This housekeeping is a very complex business," he admitted to Cassandra. "I don't suppose the girl could go out and buy things without some authority. And yet to have one's work broken in on for every delinquent buttermilk — I can't believe it's necessary. We must get a system."

"We must," Cassandra admitted, not without mischief.

"Well, what are you jeering at now?"

"I was only thinking that you really do look a little like Miss Myrtle. I never noticed it before. Housekeeping seems to bring it out."

He laughed, his quick, startled laugh, at the jibe as he turned to his waiting carriage.

"I see I shall have to go to Ann Blossom for sympathy," he observed. "I am off now. I think dinner is all right; it ought to be."

"*I am sympathetic!*" She called it after him with impulsive abruptness. He smiled and nodded back at her.

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"I know!" he assured her.

Dinner would have been all right but for the storeroom keys, which Miss Myrtle had handed over to Caspar with earnest injunctions, and which, once in his pocket, had been completely forgotten. As his written menu demanded ingredients securely locked up, he found Ronsard in a panic of nerves and Hattie waiting for him in grim patience when he came peacefully home at the end of the day.

"Dinner'll be an hour late," Hattie explained in her most "Don't blame me" tone. Caspar handed over the keys with apologetic haste.

"Quite right, Hattie — it was all my fault. Never mind the pudding — just tell Ronsard to get dinner as quickly as possible. I have to leave early."

"Ain't you coming to give out the stores?"

"Certainly not. Get what is wanted."

"Miss Myrtle won't like it."

"I can't help that." And he cut short the discussion by walking off. "Really, housekeeping is very hard on the temper," he reflected. "Six days more of it —! Whew!"

Dinner was very late, and he had to leave in the middle to deliver his address. When, an hour later, he rose to face his audience, buoyantly secure, enjoying their welcoming applause and

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the power of his own voice, Hattie, seated at the kitchen table with pen and ink, was laboriously writing as follows: —

MISS MYRTLE, —

I promised to report, so I do. Things is going every whitch way. He tries, but he's got no head for it. He went off with the storeroom keys so the dinner was late. He don't like to be asd questions and then theres no butter for lunch. Miss Snel most had a tantrum about it. Several things is broke and ought to be replaced. The ice pik. The can opener. I forgot to tell you Villum broke a little bowel. One of the blue and white mush ones. He don't give out the stores, so I have to take whats wanted. We will do the best we can.

Hoping you are enjoying good health.

Yours respectfully,

HATTIE.

This was folded into one of the stamped and addressed envelopes Miss Myrtle had provided, and put into the post. Then Hattie counted the silver into the basket and carried it up to Dr. Diman's room. He should not shirk all his responsibilities, her manner of setting it down implied.

Caspar awoke the next morning to a sense of heavy care. His mind flew at once to his cases, but none of them at that moment was adequate cause for the gloom that enveloped him. Then a step in the hall brought a mutter of enlightenment: that confounded housekeeping!

The step prefaced a knock on his door. It

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seemed that no orders for breakfast had been issued.

"But, Hattie, don't we always have cereal and eggs?" he protested without rising.

"Which cereal? There's five in the house."

"Oh — cracked wheat."

"Takes six hours to cook."

"Well, then, any other. It doesn't matter."

"Miss Myrtle always had rolled oats on Wednesday — I don't suppose you'd want that." Evidently Hattie still cherished a grievance on the score of Tuesday's boiled mutton.

"Yes, certainly. And poach the eggs."

"You had 'em that way yesterday."

"Did we? I don't see that it matters. However, have an omelet."

"Well. The kitchen fasset needs a new washer. It's wastin' all the hot water."

"I will see you about everything when I come down." His tone dismissed her, as she admitted with a patient,

"You'll have to give me the silver if I'm to lay the table." He passed it out, and closed the door with a sigh.

"Six days more!" he murmured; then, "Poor old Myrtle!"

After breakfast he reluctantly sat down to composing the day's bill of fare. It seemed all

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at once an impossibly distasteful and difficult business — what did people eat, anyway? He could not turn to Cassandra, for she had gone up to town to lunch with an old friend — asking “a day off” with sham meekness that was scarcely respectful, and that left him smiling deeply after her. Ann had disappeared, so he had to struggle with soups and desserts as best he could. He was uncomfortably aware that his menu had an amateur quality when he carried it out to the kitchen.

Ronsard was all welcome and beautiful deference.

“Whatever monsieur orders, if it is within my poor powers!” he declared, with a bow to the list, which his eyes were too dim to read. Hattie wasted no time in generalities.

“The man’s coming to fix the range,” she announced. “Do you want to put him off?”

“Why, no.”

“You can’t have a hot lunch, then. Did you mean canned asparagus?”

“Certainly not: fresh.”

“Well. It’s been out of season for six weeks, that’s all. And you can’t have prune pudding without you soak the prunes over night.”

Caspar took back the paper with an exasperated tightening of his jaw. Revising it to suit

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what the market afforded and what Miss Snell would eat took twenty minutes of his precious morning. When at last he had made his escape, the man for the range insisted on an interview and showed an irrepressible tendency to relate the entire history of his twenty years' experience of ranges in support of his claim that a new water-back was needed. When it had been ordered, recklessly, for the sake of freedom, a bare five minutes of peace intervened before the announcement that they hadn't any melons to-day, and would he order something else. Then Miss Snell, hearing that the range was disabled, had a panic about her second hot water, and had to be personally reassured with a spirit lamp. And, ten minutes later, did he want to feed beggars? Miss Myrtle never did, but there was one at the back door now, and Hattie thought she'd better ask.

"Lord, Lord!" muttered Caspar, starting to his feet and looking wildly about for his hat, "I shall go raving mad! Hattie, I am out. Do what you like with the beggar or with —"

Wheels outside the glass door interrupted. Stealing a cautious look, he saw a stout, familiar form revolving down from a hired carriage.

"Myrtle!" he exclaimed. She turned to him a face of nervous apology, but he put his arms about her and kissed her with reassuring warmth.

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"I couldn't help it, Caspar," she explained hurriedly. "I didn't sleep all night — I kept remembering things I hadn't seen to, like the French laundry bill. I simply had to come home. Of course, I can go back again to-night —" She eyed him anxiously as she hesitated.

"Well, if it really worries you to be away, my dear!" Caspar conceded heartily. Her face lighted.

"Oh, Caspar, it does! Just at this time, when there is so much to see to. If you don't really mind — I brought my bag." And she turned back to the carriage with happy haste. "It is good of you, dear brother." He felt Hattie's eye on him and it hampered his spontaneity.

"It's all right, Myrtle. I can try running the house some other time, when I am less rushed." This was aimed at Hattie's expression, which he did not like. "I suppose I can leave you in charge now. Good-by!" And he closed the front door after him with a long, deep breath of relief.

"Well, I got your letter, Hattie," Miss Myrtle admitted in a lowered tone as the other followed her up-stairs with her bag. "I just had to come after that."

"Nobody's sorry," observed Hattie; but she stopped there. She was, in her way, a good sort.

VIII

ERNEST clearly was not happy. The trouble, whatever it was, had come on him suddenly; Ann Blossom could have told the day, and had a haunting fear that Miss Joyce might know the very hour. The two had taken the same train to town, he gay, alert, looking back from the gate to wave his hat to Ann, and so leaving her momentarily cheered and reassured. Miss Joyce, after lunching with an old friend, had come home alone; Ernest had not appeared until nearly midnight. Ann had — not exactly sat up for him, but stayed up very late reading, and so she was the only person in the big living-room when the door opened and Ernest came slowly in — a changed, aloof, unresponsive Ernest who did not want anything to eat, and who went up-stairs without seeing her good-night hand.

He was more like himself at breakfast, but the withdrawal was unmistakable. She gave him a chance for a walk with her, and he made an unconvincing excuse. Miss Joyce greeted him just as usual; she would, of course, no matter what

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sentimental episode might have passed between them. Ann could torture herself into believing anything.

He was heart-breakingly kind to Ann all the following week, but he kept away. Caspar was too deeply absorbed in an outside tragedy he was trying to avert to pay much attention to his household, and Cassandra, who was wholly guiltless in the matter, noticed only that the young professor was quieter than usual. He was always, to her, a person easily forgotten.

That she should have been taken into his confidence was due solely to the accident of her appearing at the proper moment and demanding it. In a remote corner of the grounds there was a plot called "the experiment garden," where he and Ann had laboured with equal enthusiasm in sun, wind, and rain. Curious results of grafting and cross-fertilizing had kept them awake nights with excitement, and already they were on their way to a new carnation that, if it proved all it promised, was to be given to the world as "the Ann Blossom." The experiments had been neglected this sad week, and Ann had not once been summoned to help or to look on. Ernest did little work himself, but he had wandered down there one late afternoon and was sitting on the ground beside the future Ann Blossom carnation

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with knees drawn up and head resting on his arms when Cassandra happened by.

"You don't look exactly cheerful," she commented, pausing. He protested that he was, but, having seen his face, she, too, sat down by the Ann Blossom and demanded the trouble.

He tried to hold it back, but it would come. It was only his eyes, he explained with a manful attempt at offhand carelessness. The oculist was not satisfied with their progress, and at the last interview had warned him against counting too securely on going back to his work in the autumn. Ernest thought it was all nonsense, himself: the man had always shown himself an alarmist. But if it was true, it — well, rather upset some very important plans. Important to him, at least. He was eagerly ready to smile at the size of his tragedy, as seen from the world's viewpoint.

"I am very fortunate in not having anyone dependent upon me," he added, after expressing his stout disbelief in the warning.

"What does Dr. Diman say?" was her first question. He had not told Dr. Diman or anyone, and was nervously anxious for her promise of secrecy. The doctor had all he could carry, just now, and there was no sense in worrying other people. It was a great relief to have told

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her, but he was apologetic for the selfishness of it. Nothing could be done.

"But haven't your eyes felt better lately?" she demanded.

"Very much. I thought he would tell me that they would be practically well again by autumn."

"Very well, then! I should go to town tomorrow and consult the biggest oculist there."

Ernest looked up, brightening.

"You think he might disagree?"

"I do. Moreover, if you sit here wondering about them, you are bound to make them worse. Have you money enough?" she added, feeling that he hesitated.

"Oh, yes; I can manage that," he said so hastily that she knew she had hit on a difficulty. In her pocket lay an envelope containing a month's salary, and she drew it out, keeping it concealed in the palm of her hand.

"Look here," she began; "if you tell him you come from Dr. Diman, he probably won't ask his regular fee. But in any case you must feel you have plenty with you. Put that in your pocket." And she dropped the envelope into his hand.

"Oh, no! Miss Joyce — it is impossible!" He was crimson.

"Nonsense!" She would not take it back.

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"It is what any friend would do, isn't it? And aren't we friends?"

"Surely. But—"

"I know everything you want to say;" she spoke more gently. "Don't say it. Just do as I ask. And when you are at work again, you can pay it back. Please, Ernest."

The use of his first name won, though there had to be a great deal more argument before the flush had left his face and the envelope was put into his pocket. They stayed talking for a long time, and it was a much cheered person who finally followed her back to the house. Ann, who always knew instinctively where Ernest was, had seen Cassandra take the path to the experiment garden two hours before, and she heard his laughter as they came back together. For once her courage failed her. Hattie informed them, later, that Miss Blossom had gone to bed with a headache and did not wish to be disturbed.

Ernest was on his way to town before the household gathered for breakfast the next morning, but early in the afternoon he reappeared with a general air of having run all the way home. He waved his hat boyishly to Cassandra from the doorway, with a laugh that told his news, then, catching sight of Ann Blossom in the garden, he darted after her.

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"Isn't it a great day!" he exclaimed.

"Isn't it!" she echoed automatically.

"Oh, Ann, I have had such a week!" And the tale of his fright, followed by to-day's complete reassurance, was poured out without reserve or manful attitudinizing: no "only eyes" nonsense in telling Ann. He was so sure of her sympathy, so intent on the tremendous thing he meant to say, when his physical well-being had been sufficiently emphasized, that he scarcely noticed her silence; he could see only the soft outline of the downcast face. When some of this exuberance ran over in praise of Miss Joyce, the head was abruptly lifted.

"Didn't she show splendid sense?" he exclaimed. "She is really a fine woman, Ann — so strong and clear-headed. We are fortunate to be her friends." The only detail he had not confided was the envelope in his pocket — still unopened, for the great man had insisted that his services should be a brotherhood offering to Dr. Diman.

"So you told her — first," said Ann, quietly.

"Why, it merely happened;" Ernest looked bewildered.

"I don't know; I should think it would have been more natural to tell old friends, like Dr. Diman or me."

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"But, Ann —!"

"It doesn't matter. I can understand it perfectly." She smiled kindly, but from a distance. "As you say, she is unusually fine and strong. Suppose we tell her the good news at once." She firmly led him back to the house and turned him over to Cassandra, making an escape upstairs herself.

In her own room, it is shameful to relate, she laughed, a smothered, joyful, excited laugh. In all her gentle life she had never before wilfully hurt anyone, and she found a novel and wicked satisfaction in prolonging what had undeniably been a stab of pain into a righteous grievance. Someone had to pay for the week she had gone through! So, with the utmost friendliness, she kept Ernest at a distance, maliciously threw him and Cassandra together, and, giddy with hope, enjoyed herself exceedingly for two days that were quite as long as the preceding ones to the baffled, apologetic young professor. On the second morning he lured her into a set of tennis, but she dropped it in the middle on a palpable excuse. Her face was mischievously radiant, her light brown hair wildly disordered, as she came running into the big room with a box under one arm.

"A boy just brought this for you, Miss Joyce."

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Her happy voice preceded her. "I thought perhaps it was a birthday present for Miss Snell, so I intercepted him."

"Is it Miss Snell's birthday?" Cassandra asked, pulling the string from the florist's box that Ann had laid in front of her.

"Yes. I do wish we had known it in time to make a proper birthday fuss over her. Miss Myrtle says it is too late even for a cake."

Cassandra slowly shook her head. "I couldn't make a fuss over Miss Snell."

"But she is such a poor old thing, and Dr. Diman would have been so pleased," Ann urged. The last reason arrested Cassandra's interest.

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh, because she is his pet cure — if you could have seen her when she came! And because he is so sorry for lonely people. I gave her a little handkerchief someone had given me, and though she didn't say much, you could see how touched and delighted she was, underneath. Oh, how lovely!" Ann clasped her hands over a fragrant mass of gardenias.

Cassandra lifted them and glanced carelessly in the box for a card, a purely formal precaution, as these offerings had always come without name. Then she laid the flowers back and replaced the cover.

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"Suppose we give them to Miss Snell as a birthday present," she suggested.

"Oh, how *darling* of you!" Ann evidently found it hard not to embrace her.

"She would never take them from me," Cassandra added. "We are not on the best possible terms. Should you like to give them?"

Ann demurred: so lavish a present would not be suitable, from her. They finally decided that the box should be done up with a printed address and delivered anonymously by a messenger, details which Ann attended to with singing enthusiasm. It was arranged that the boy should arrive at lunch time, that Miss Snell might be on hand to get the full sensation.

Ann allowed herself to be persuaded back to her tennis and Cassandra had forgotten the incident when, an hour later, she saw boy and box approaching. She strolled quietly up towards her room before the bell rang, to avoid any possible question. Only Miss Snell and Miss Myrtle were present when Hattie opened the front door. Miss Snell untied the box in silent, even suspicious, amazement.

"Well, I must say, Miss Snell, somebody thinks a lot of you," commented Miss Myrtle, with more cordiality than she often displayed. "I heard it was your birthday."

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"Such strong odours are unpleasant to me, but it was kindly intended," Miss Snell admitted. Her tone was coldly grudging, but the giver, lurking unseen at the head of the stairs, could detect a gratified flush on the sallow face. "There does not seem to be any card with them," she added, lifting out the flowers and turning to look again at the printed address.

"What is this?" And, to Cassandra's horror, Miss Myrtle stooped and picked up a small white envelope that had slipped from among the heavy blossoms. The girl paled with dismay and started forward, then stopped helplessly where she was. The gift had been well meant, and the prospect of being hideously snubbed for her kindly impulse was unendurable. A faint hope of escaping detection sprang up when she saw that there was no name on the envelope, and deepened to a momentary relief as Miss Snell drew out, not a man's engraved card, but the ordinary blank one supplied by florists. Something was written on it in pencil, and Cassandra grew cold and dizzy again as she faced the possibilities. What had that abominable man said?

It was obviously not a casual message. The flush ebbed from Miss Snell's face as she spelled it out. She pushed the flowers from her lap

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and turned hastily to the couch. "I must lie down," she stammered. Miss Myrtle allowed her to arrange herself with unfeeling inattention.

"If you want me to get water for these, I will," she said, gathering them up and laying them on the table. As Miss Snell returned no answer beyond a brief closing of her eyes, she trotted off with a muttered, "Smelled of gas, I suppose!" and shut the door vigorously behind her.

Cassandra, from the stairs, saw Miss Snell open the hand that had clenched on the card and read the message again and again, sometimes in wide-eyed distress, sometimes with frightened excitement. Her lips moved silently. Once or twice she half started up, and then sank back again. When Dr. Diman came in, she thrust the card into the black silk bag that hung at her belt and made a desperate effort at composure.

"Hello! What have you been doing to yourself?" he demanded.

"Nothing. A momentary — I feel better for lying down." She moved uneasily under his scrutiny. "See the present I have just had," she added, to turn his eyes from her twitching face.

"Very nice indeed," he assented absently.

Ann and Ernest, coming in at that moment

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from the garden, showed a proper enthusiasm over the present, which was borne off to decorate the lunch table.

"You should have had a surprise party and a cake if we had known about your birthday in time," Ann told her.

"I don't eat cake, and surprises upset my heart, but I am sure you are very kind," said Miss Snell, making a shattered effort to rise.

Cassandra came reluctantly down and followed the rest to the dining-room in silence. Obviously the card had not betrayed her; but *what* had the man said?

Miss Snell ate nothing, and presently retreated again to the hall couch. Dr. Diman cut his lunch in half to follow her, though no one would have guessed it by the casual way he picked up a paper and sat down a little out of her range of vision. The paper turned quietly at intervals, but it was ten minutes before she spoke.

"Dr. Diman." It came with a nervous jerk. . His harmonious, unstartling, "Well?" brought her voice down several keys.

"Can you tell me the name of the librarian in the Sciences and Religions department of the library?" was the unexpected question.

"Why, let me see — little bald chap who shuffles his feet?"

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"He has a well-stored intelligence, and his features are noticeably refined," said Miss Snell coldly.

"Yes, I guess that's so," he apologized with a startled glance at the top of her head. "Why, isn't his name Barnes?"

"B," breathed Miss Snell, closing her eyes. "Do you know his first initial?" she added faintly.

"No, I don't. I am not certain about Barnes, either. Could it be Downes? Some such name. He has often helped me out; I ought not to have forgotten."

"It is probably Barnes," she said with finality. "He has shown me — marked courtesy. I have been appreciative of it — nothing more." Her voice rose excitedly. "A lady is always courteous to a gentleman who goes out of his way to assist her. No one has a right to — misconstrue such courtesy, or to — take — advantage of it. I — I shall not consider myself to blame, in any event —" Her words were lost in nervous sobbing.

"Can't you tell me what has happened?" In spite of the gentleness of his approach, she took panic.

"Nothing has happened, nothing whatever," she gasped. "I am f-fanciful, that is all. I wish you wouldn't talk about it!" He waited

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until her sobs had ceased, then rose with determination.

"I will give you five minutes to get ready in," he said, offering his hand to help her rise.

"Ready for whom — what?" she almost shrieked.

"For a birthday drive with me," he reassured her. "I shall have to stop for a consultation on the way, but that won't take long."

"You won't expect me to hold the horse?"

"Certainly not. I'll tie him head and tail if you like. Come on."

She rose, then sank back. "I am not equal," she murmured.

He insisted that she would be presently and despatched Ann for her things; and after the latter had made three willing trips to the top of the house for special varieties of veil, gloves, and wrap, they got off. Ann looked pitifully after them.

"Poor old dear, with all he had to do this afternoon," she sighed. "What do you suppose could have upset Miss Snell so?"

Cassandra turned impatiently from the topic. She felt angry and ill-used that her first small effort towards a kinder attitude should have been requited so badly. The need to know what the card had said harassed her into hunting for the

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black silk bag, which might by merciful chance have followed its daily habit of dropping off. But to-day fate was against her; the bag had obviously gone driving.

Miss Snell looked more composed when Dr. Diman set her down at the garden gate, two hours later, and hurried on to do what he could with the remainder of the afternoon. She came in without seeming to see Cassandra, a daily intention which the latter found a wicked pleasure in frustrating.

"Did you have a pleasant drive?" she asked with specious cordiality.

"Very, thank you," Miss Snell conceded, after a pause; the gathering string of her lips was drawn to its tightest. Then her chilly precision was shattered by an exclamation of alarm. She clutched wildly about her belt. "My bag, my black silk bag," she stammered.

"You have dropped it?" cried Cassandra hopefully, jumping up. Miss Snell had no time for small animosities now. "I had it when I started. Oh, I must find it!" Cassandra was all obligingness in the matter of searching. They followed Miss Snell's path down to the gate, and even walked along the road a short distance.

"You must have lost it off in the carriage,"

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Cassandra finally decided. "It will come home safe with Dr. Diman. If it does not, I am sure Miss Blossom will make you another," she added guilelessly.

"I happen to want this one," was the curt answer, as Miss Snell turned unhappily to her own room.

Cassandra was watching for Dr. Diman when he came back. She ran out and stopped him on his way to the stable. "Did Miss Snell leave a bag in the carriage?" she asked eagerly. "She has been so distressed about losing it." He looked at her very kindly in return for her solicitude.

"Yes, here it is. It did not occur to me that she would worry," he said in so warm a voice that she felt dimly ashamed. But she had not time for side issues now. The unfortunate card was in her possession and she must seize her chance.

She ran back into the empty hall, and stood panting and hesitating at the foot of the stairs. There was nothing unscrupulous in reading a note intended for herself; yet the apparent underhandedness of the act revolted her even as she fumbled with the ribbons that held the top. They opened at her pull, and her fingers had already found the little envelope within when an acid

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voice fell from above like a heavy hand on the shoulder of guilt.

"When you have quite finished exploring my bag, Miss Joyce, I will take it." Miss Snell stood in the shadow at the head of the stairs, so tremulous with anger that she had to support herself by the banister; her face worked like a crying child's, though she managed to keep her voice jerkily articulate. Cassandra stared at her in helpless silence, forgetting for the moment that her conduct was not as outrageous as it looked. "I suspected it wasn't all kindness that made you so zealous about my bag! I knew you better than that, miss! I thought I had better be down here to get it myself, and it seems I was just in time. Of course, if there is anything you want to know about my private affairs —"

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" Cassandra broke in. "Don't be so unreasonable. I know it looked queer, but if you will calm down enough to hear the whole truth —"

Miss Snell broke into hysterical crying. "I won't hear another word from you! Don't you ever presume to address me! Drop my bag at once!"

"But, you old fool," blazed Cassandra, throwing down the bag.

"That will do, please!" Caspar's voice, quiet

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and stern, fell chillingly on her wrath as he strode past her, picking up first the bag, then the sobbing, crouching figure on the stairs. "Come up to your room," he said in a wholly different tone, and, clinging to him, she let herself be half carried away.

Cassandra threw herself miserably into a chair to await his return. She had tried to please him, to do a kind act, and she was only in deeper disgrace than ever. She was a failure — always a failure. But Caspar should not be left to think that she read other people's letters. No matter how angry he was, he must hear the truth about that.

It was a long time before he came down. She waited for him to speak, but he passed her without a glance and closed the door of his office behind him. After a moment's hesitation, Cassandra rose and knocked. Her head was well up, but her heart had never thudded so terribly in all her life. At his "Come" she pushed open the door, but did not enter.

"Dr. Diman, it is not fair that you should think Miss Snell accused me justly." It was humiliating, how her voice stumbled and shook, but she kept doggedly on. "I did look as if I were trying to pry into her affairs, but as a matter of fact —"

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His gesture seemed to brush all that aside. "You don't need to assure me of that. Accusations made by a person in her nervous state are wholly unimportant — couldn't you have realized that?" He leaned his arms on the desk and for the first time looked at her. His lifted face was so sad and tired that she could have flung herself at his feet in her sudden, overwhelming abasement; but she only held her head a little higher in a desperate effort after self-control. "You would not answer back or be angry if someone accused you in delirium, would you? The only way to deal with sick people is to take the nurse's attitude — to eliminate self beyond the possibility of a grievance. Until you realize that, you will inevitably do more harm than good." He let his hands drop before him and turned away. "Will you kindly ask Ann Blossom to come here?" he added.

Cassandra closed the door in silence on her dismissal, but her face flamed. Ann Blossom — always Ann Blossom! She, Cassandra, made trouble, and now Ann Blossom was undoubtedly summoned to help smooth it out. They were like two Sunday-school heroines, the bad one and the good one. Great heavens, how banal it all was!

Ann was strolling down the garden path, still

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with the lighted face that she had shown ever since Ernest had come hurrying back from town with his good news. She had a trick of walking with her hands turned slightly out at her sides, as though to suit the convenience of little clinging fingers; at such times her steps loitered happily by the pansy bed and the puff balls in the grass.

The dreaminess vanished from her eyes as the doctor's message was curtly delivered; she came with a glad alacrity that Cassandra found maddening. Really, the girl was scarcely decent in the openness of her adoration. Dr. Diman would find it cloying if he were not such a — such an *innocent*, Cassandra hotly concluded.

She was still standing in the doorway, scowling into the garden, when Ernest came contentedly from his finished labours, polishing his dark glasses, preparatory to putting them away, and looking about with satisfaction on his orderly domain. "Several interesting things are happening in the experiment garden," he told her. "Should you like to come and see?"

"No," said Cassandra.

A nearer view of her face checked his laughter. "Tired to death?" he asked with his ready sympathy.

"Tired to death; bored to death; discouraged to death! I am going to run away."

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"Will you let me run away with you?"

"I didn't know you wanted to escape."

"I don't. I want to bring you back when you have had enough."

"Dr. Diman would not thank you. Nothing would delight and relieve him like my disappearance."

"You don't really think that."

"Don't I? Well, it matters so little what I think that I shall not argue about it."

"Poor soul! What can I do for you?"

She sighed fretfully. "I think, if you were to admire me a little, it might help," she admitted. "I have been called names ever since I came here! Most of them true, but I am not used to that sort of truth, and I find it — wearing." The office door had opened, and Ann and Caspar had come slowly out, talking in an earnest undertone. The young man, braced in the doorway with his back to the great room, had not heard them; but Cassandra, keenly conscious of Ann's upturned face and Caspar's hand on her shoulder, felt a fierce impulse to punish, to show herself heart-whole and desired of other men. She bent towards Ernest, smiling subtly.

"Couldn't you please admire me, just this once?" she murmured.

His senses were obviously startled out of their

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usual calm balance by the appeal. "I think I could manage it, Miss Joyce!" His laugh was breathless.

"How will you show it?" The voices at the other end of the hall had faltered, were continuing less smoothly. That was something. "You will have to rub it in, if you are going to comfort me to-night." She braced her hand against the door jamb, so that her arm was not three inches from his ear. "How, how?" she repeated imperiously. He had actually flushed, this untried young professor of botany. He would never of himself have dared to lift her other hand to his lips, but she gave it to him, and some outside force seemed to carry it there. To be sure, he dropped it unceremoniously, looking distinctly ashamed; but little she cared, since that earnest tête-à-tête by the office door had been effectually broken up. Ann had disappeared.

"Come and run away with me; I need to get off the place," she begged. "Take me miles away."

"Anywhere you like," he assented, evidently relieved at the prospect of action. A few moments later she nodded a casual good-by to Caspar as she ran down the stairs.

"I am going out with Mr. Cunningham. Don't wait dinner if we are not here." He made no

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answer whatever, a rudeness that gave her a wicked satisfaction.

They were not back at dinner-time, nor at eight, nor when the clock struck nine of the warm summer night. Ann brought her sewing and sat down by Caspar, working feverishly. Ever since the two had closed the gate behind them in the late afternoon, she had been indefatigable, waiting on Miss Snell, who had gone to bed, a mass of wrecked nerves, helping Hattie, running errands for Miss Myrtle; but all the day's brightness had been crushed out.

"Read to me," she begged when she and Caspar were left alone together; "just where you are."

"Well, if you think that the Opsonic Index in Diabetes Mellitus would amuse you —"

"Yes, it would. I don't care what it means: I just want to hear your voice."

He began at once, paying little heed to the meaning himself in his poignant consciousness of her suffering. Her transparent face had a stricken pallor that drew his glance again and again. She sewed furiously, her eyes wide and fixed, her lips opening now and then to a silent gasp, as though the hurt were a bodily wound. Any sound from without visibly stabbed her. Caspar suddenly dropped his pamphlet.

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"Ann, should you like to go away?" he asked.

"No."

"Should you like — anyone else to go away?"

"No." She looked up at him with desperate courage. "I don't want what isn't mine by rights. If a thing can be won away from me, then I would rather it happened now. I won't have anything but the truth. And a man must be true to his own heart, whatever it costs."

"It is not always a question of heart. I wish you knew more about men, Ann dear. It would help you to understand."

"Can't you tell me? I need help."

He tried to, very frankly and affectionately, but she was too full of pain to understand. Presently she started up, letting her work fall.

"No, no — it's no use. Men may be like that, but this is different. Who would care for me after knowing a woman like her?"

He rose to put impressive hands on her shoulders.

"Ann Blossom," he said earnestly, "three men would love you where one would love her. She is dazzling, perhaps, but — only a fool could find her more desirable," he ended with bitter vehemence. She threw herself into his arms, burying her face against his coat.

"Ah, comfort me, comfort me!" she sobbed,

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not knowing what she said. He held her close with his cheek against her hair. After a moment she broke away from him and ran up-stairs, her face in her hands.

Caspar went into his office and closed the door. It did not occur to him that anyone crossing the lawn might have seen through the glass doors, and misunderstood.

IX

MISS SNELL was visibly worse the next day. Symptoms that had been banished two or three months before reasserted themselves. She complained of improbable throbbings, impossible pains; one hour her right arm was pronounced helpless, the next she was unable to walk. Weeks of apparent gain seemed to be swept away by some hysterical excitement, the source of which Dr. Diman laboured in vain to discover. He was called away for the day and went most reluctantly.

"If you can only find out what she has got in her head!" were his last words to Ann. She smiled courageously over her promise to try. Neither had made any allusion to last night, even when he had handed her a pencilled note, found on the breakfast table, in which Ernest announced, without explanation, that he had gone off for two or three days.

Cassandra came down late, her eyes heavy, her lips in a very straight line. She was not surprised to find Ernest gone; the look in his face last night when, pale and oppressed, they entered the empty hall, had been a revealing one. The

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whole evening had been leading up to some such explanation. The scene had been obviously set for romance. Cassandra, strung with vivid consciousness of her own vitality and power, and angrily reckless how she used them, had looked to see this inexperienced young teacher of botany crumple helplessly before her. He was to be the sacrifice to her hurt vanity, the scapegoat for her suffering. They went swinging through miles of green country in an open car, mercifully deserted; they dined under grape-vines, four elbows on a little table and a bottle of *vin ordinaire* between them: they came swinging home again through the scented darkness, and all the time the young botanist had laughed, argued, admired, — and looked on. He was like a spectator at an exciting new show; no applause was withheld, but at the close he would go peaceably home to his own. And what his own was she saw with startling clearness as they came into the lamplight.

“Didn’t you know she was in love with him?” she had asked, with a laugh that must have seemed to him heartless.

“In love — with Dr. Diman?” he repeated dazedly.

“Good heavens, yes! Haven’t you seen it?” It was a relief to be impatient with him. “But

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I never dreamed that he — a man of his —” The dryness of her mouth stopped her.

“Of course. A man like that — she would be, naturally,” he stammered. “They are — I think, if you will excuse me, I will —” He turned to the stairs and left her without a look. So he was explained, this untried young professor who had withstood so genially her imperious femininity. In love with Ann Blossom, of course; everyone was in love with Ann Blossom. Her breath came sobbingly, though her eyes were dry and hard. That was the sort of woman who always won: dependent and innocent and —

“Oh, *God!*” broke sharply from her. She pressed her palm against her shaking mouth and ran up to her room.

Miss Snell spent the morning in bed, but after luncheon let Ann persuade her to come down where it was cooler and establish herself in the doctor’s office. As she showed an inclination to doze, Ann stole out, leaving the door ajar. “If she wants anything, would you mind calling me?” she whispered to Cassandra, who was busy at her desk.

“Certainly,” was the dry answer. It was the first time that they had spoken to each other that day, and their eyes did not meet.

Ann went up-stairs, but evidently Miss Snell

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could not sleep. Cassandra heard her sighing and twisting. Presently she rose and went with hurried, furtive steps to the mantelpiece. Cassandra, by leaning forward, could see her standing in front of its old-fashioned mirror, staring intently at her own reflection. The narrow, melancholy face, with its little patch of sandy curls above and the flaring plaid bow beneath, seemed to have hypnotized her into immobility; but presently she began to try small feminine experiments, pitifully out of keeping with her harassed eyes and drawn mouth. She lifted the little curls back into a pompadour, then tried the effect of parting and drawing them down across her high temples. The plaid bow was turned up into a stock, then concealed under a handkerchief, whose lace edge was shaped into a turnover collar by the tremulous fingers. Her cheeks were rubbed into a momentary red.

Cassandra drew back in disgust. "The old fool!" was her impatient thought. This, of course, was the effect of the ardent message that she had found on Burnett's card: she supposed that her charms had aroused some vehement passion, and, womanlike, was anxious to go on with the good work. Cassandra had a brief laugh for the idea, but there was little amusement in it. Burnett's message and Miss Snell's vaga-

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ries seemed equally remote and unimportant in the misery that had closed down on her since last night.

As the afternoon wore on, Miss Snell grew more flighty and restless. Cassandra could hear her talking vehemently to herself, moving incessantly from couch to chair and from chair to couch. Whenever the doorbell rang she gave a startled gasp and fled to the back regions of the house. Cassandra grew as uneasy as Ann evidently was, and they both watched impatiently for Dr. Diman, though from different rooms.

He came at last with his unhurried step, his hat pushed back on his head, the little rose drooping on his shapeless coat. Cassandra, watching him from the window, felt a sudden burning anguish behind her eyes. Here, at last, was the man whom one could love without compromise. She had looked for him before on coaches and automobiles, in ballrooms, in country houses and city streets, looked, in her crass ignorance, wherever there was a proper coat or an alluring background; but out of these necessary accessories the man of iron strength and clean heart had never chanced to confront her. And now, having found him, she knew that the accessories to which she had committed herself were as nothing; but, because she was too late, because,

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too, she was spoiled and vulgarized by the life she had led, because she had accepted the grim necessity of compromise, the best was not for her. And yet, in that moment, it seemed to her that if he would just once put his arms about her as he had put them about Ann Blossom last night, she could bear anything life might send.

At the sound of Caspar's step on the gravel, Miss Snell, who had been induced to lie down, started up with a gasp that was almost a scream. He came in hurriedly. "What was that?" he demanded. Miss Snell's strained, twitching face at the office door was answer enough. He took her up-stairs at once, without so much as a glance of greeting for the two girls. An hour passed before he came down into the hall where they were waiting, each seemingly unconscious of the other.

"She has gone to sleep with an opiate," he said to their unspoken inquiries. "Ann, I don't suppose you found out what she has got on her mind? I'd give a year's income to know," he added, a hand clasping the back of his neck.

"Why, I think I know," said Cassandra.

"You do!" There was exasperation as well as relief in his tone and she stiffened.

"It is a guess, of course. On her birthday I turned over to her some flowers that had been

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sent to me, and, unfortunately, she found a card in them. I don't know what it said;" her colour rose; "but no doubt something that made her think someone was — very much — struck by her. I tried to see the card when I had her black silk bag, but she caught me and was furious — naturally enough. I should rather like to get hold of it."

Caspar listened with grave eyes averted. "Ann, do you think you could steal into her room and get the card?" he asked after a pause.

She was off at once, her eagerness to serve restoring a momentary brightness to her face. When she had brought the desired envelope, she slipped out. The doctor gave it to Cassandra and walked away as she opened it. The message made her frown impatiently. It had somewhat the same effect on Caspar, to whom she handed it.

Coming Sunday — tired of waiting to be asked. I'd rather be thrown out than never see you.

G. B.

"Why, to-morrow will be Sunday," Cassandra exclaimed. "I suppose she thought some admirer was coming to see her," she added, as he said nothing.

"Yes; and the two days of suspense have undone the work of two months — of all four months,

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perhaps. Miss Joyce, I wouldn't have had this happen for anything on earth."

"I am sure it has been no pleasure to me."

"But why you didn't tell me! Why you let me blunder on, not understanding! How could you be so thoughtless?"

"Ah, it is no use!" She lifted her hands in passionate exasperation. "I am only a failure here; I do nothing right. I shall take the one way out."

"You mean?" His anger had vanished.

"I mean that any life whatever will be better than this," she answered out of her blinding pain.

"Well, I suppose we can have dinner now. It is only three quarters of an hour after time," said Miss Myrtle plaintively from the doorway.

The next morning might have been taken as an object lesson in the disadvantages of what Miss Myrtle called "gratitude service." Hattie, the one really sound and efficient member of the household staff, went to church. "I feel dreadfully at not going, myself, but I'd like to know what would become of the house if I did," Miss Myrtle sighed. The remark was as regular a part of Sunday breakfast as the fishballs, and usually excited no more comment, but to-day

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Caspar took it up and briefly ordered her to go. He would not listen to her expostulations.

"I think church would do you good," he commented. "And take lunch with Aunt Jennie."

"But, Caspar —"

"We won't argue about it. Go where you please, but don't come back into this house before four o'clock. I don't propose to have anyone kept a prisoner." He was as near irritability as she had ever seen him, and she went disconsolately to get ready.

"Don't blame me if there isn't any lunch," she warned them.

Ann Blossom started to tidy the living-room, and got so far as to pile the faded flowers on a newspaper and to fill a chair with brushes and dusters. Then she recollected that certain young plants in the experiment garden would need shelter from the hot sun, and hurried out to attend to them. She apparently forgot to come back, so Cassandra took hold herself, finding relief in activity. She had never handled brush or duster before, yet in five minutes she was using them more efficiently than Ann did. The dustpan puzzled her at first; the dust seemed to go round and under it rather than in.

"Hold it in your left hand and press it down harder," said a voice over her head. Caspar

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was looking on from the doorway. "And use the brush more lightly — like this." He took it from her, and together they engineered the fluff of dust into the receptacle. Then he brushed off his knee with his hand and went on up to Miss Snell. Cassandra had not lifted her eyes or spoken. It was the first time that he had approached her since her fiery declaration of last night; he had given no least sign of any desire to turn her from its consequences. Her heart sagged heavily in her side as she looked at the clock. Burnett would probably come early in the afternoon. And then —?

"What else can I do?" she cried to herself. When she had finished down-stairs she went to her room and began to pack her clothes. If it had to be, it might as well come as soon as possible. "Perhaps this is my wedding day!" she thought with a short laugh.

At luncheon time she found a table for three spread in one end of the great hall. "It is so much cooler than the dining-room; but Miss Myrtle won't let us when she is home," Ann explained with resolute cheerfulness. "Hattie hasn't come back."

"Wise Hattie," was the languid comment. Ann went into the office to drag Caspar forth, and Cassandra shut her eyes and ears in feverish

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dread of seeing or hearing some evidence of the secret bond between them. Ann had evidently pulled him forcibly to his feet; her right hand still held his left as they came in. That she need not see their faces, Cassandra began to fill the teacups.

"But there isn't any tea in it!" said Ann suddenly. True enough, the stream from the teapot was clear hot water. Ronsard, who had, fortunately, just set down the salad bowl, flung up his hands, bony fingers hooking desperately at high heaven.

"Ah, my God!" he cried, so tragically that they laughed. Ann tried to comfort him, but he was too intent on repairing the mistake to heed, and went off muttering execrations on himself.

"How can I cut it without any knife?" asked Caspar, presently, after feeling about under the edges of the platter that held the cold chicken.

"Ah, don't tell him! He will feel so dreadfully," begged Ann as Ronsard's agitated step approached. So Caspar affected to be absorbed in a glass of milk, playing the part with such marked lack of histrionic ability that she broke into nervous laughter. When the old chef had gone she stole into the dining-room for the carver and brought it back concealed in her skirt, where

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it had to stay until Ronsard had set down a belated dish of olives and bowed himself off. Caspar held out his hand for the knife with whimsical anxiety.

"I had that ground the other day, young woman," he warned her. "Dropping it on your foot is no longer the harmless pastime you have usually found it. I wonder why you always drop things and Miss Joyce never?" he added meditatively. If this day held any suspense or pain for him, he gave no sign of it.

"Because I am a loony," said Ann promptly.

"Perhaps because I never pretend to carry anything," suggested Cassandra.

"Consider the lilies, how they grow," he mused, good-humouredly. "Well, if carrying things is to you the worst evil, I suppose you are right to avoid it."

The reference of his words sent the blood back to her heart; she could not answer. "What else can I do?" — the question seemed to be dashing about her brain like a little animal in a trap. The way out was not through friends. Looking back, she seemed never to have made any. She had been too absorbed in men to trouble about women, too contemptuous of the men themselves — when she had "found them out," as she expressed it—to keep them. Pride and the rest-

lessness in her blood had driven her like twin furies; she could no more have stopped for friendship than the famished could pause for wild flowers. The way out through marriage with Burnett had not seemed so intolerable a month before: bitterly undesirable, to be sure, yet a possibility to be calmly reckoned with, since compromise was evidently to be her fate. Yet now every sound that might mean an arrival at the door behind her came like a signal to execution.

"I want another glass of milk, but Ronsard will be so distressed if I get up and so agitated if I ring," Ann was saying. "He's such a dear, I hate to bother him."

"Poor old boy," Caspar commented. "He must have had plenty of Gallic fire in his day. He was with you a good many years, wasn't he, Miss Joyce?"

She started. "With me —? Oh, Ronsard! Yes, indeed. And he was always making special dishes for me; we were devoted friends. I know I cried when he went away, though I was fourteen. We all felt dreadfully."

"Wouldn't he stay?" asked Ann, still with her air of resolute and cheerful interest.

"Oh, he couldn't. Something dreadful happened to his daughter Émilié, I never knew what; I think she killed herself. She had been edu-

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cated to be a typewriter, and my father had got her a position in a big leather house. Ronsard was quite off his head with grief and rage and did not work for a long time. I heard him crying and it haunted me for years. I had not known before that men cried."

"Do they?" Ann turned earnestly to Caspar.

"They prefer not to," was the cheerful answer.

"But they sometimes do — when it is all too dreadful to stand?" she persisted. He would not take it seriously.

"Yes, then they go up to their rooms and have a good cry," he assured her. "He has often spoken of his great sorrow," he went on to Casandra. "He is more broken than his years warrant, and I suppose that did it. You have been a great solace to him here. Talking French with him was a very real kindness."

"It was a comfort to me, too. We really are congenial souls, Ronsard and I." His praise wounded, it sounded so final. She was going, of course, but there was no need to see her off with parting tributes until she gave the signal. The clock struck, jarring on her nerves like a blow. She started from her seat. "Suppose we clear the table for him," she said, and hurried off to the kitchen with her hands full of cups. Lingering there to compliment Ronsard on his

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salad, she did not hear the stopping of an automobile at the front gate. When she came back, Caspar had opened the front door to a big, well-dressed man who was asking for Miss Joyce.

Cassandra's courage, sadly wanting all day, came back with a bound. She paused for a moment's level scrutiny of George Burnett, her one way out. His light brown moustache swept straight across his face, dividing it into two distinct halves. Above, in spite of retreating hair and dark marks beneath the eyes, there was a battered semblance of genial good looks, and the high dome of the forehead suggested brains; below, the sagging underlip and coarsened jaw told which half would eventually dominate. His unmodulated voice proclaimed him self-made and on good terms with his creator. Yet she had remembered him as far worse. She came forward almost with relief and introduced him to Dr. Diman. Ann had effaced herself with the luncheon dishes.

"I did it in twenty-three minutes from the ferry," Mr. Burnett had an air of congratulating them all on the achievement. Caspar, who had never learned the necessity of small talk, stood silent and wholly at his ease, obviously waiting for some more interesting topic.

"Very good indeed," said Cassandra, dryly.

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"Rather! We nearly got arrested three times. But it's funny how the horses are getting used to it. We didn't scare one the whole way."

"Yes; the sporting element is quite dying out of motoring," Cassandra assented.

"Oh, no; I never saw any fun in making the horses bolt. It caused a lot of delay," he explained gravely, and her heart sank a little.

"I shall have to remember not to be funny," was her involuntary thought. Yet she felt curiously remote and unconcerned. All the passionate misery of the past hours had vanished; she was conscious only of a dull wish to get the business over with.

Caspar was leaning on the back of a chair, looking at the caller with an intentness that brought out more clearly than ever his resemblance to General Grant.

"What is your opinion of the speed laws? Are they too stringent, unfair?" he asked.

"They're all rot." Mr. Burnett threw back his shoulders and eased his neck in his collar. "Can't possibly keep them; but you don't need to if you have the price. Laws!" He flung it out with the air of one taking up a familiar challenge. "Most of them are made to be broken, anyway. You couldn't run a legitimate business a year if you changed your course for every little

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two-for-a-cent law that gets jammed through the legislature, and the fellows that make them don't expect you to. All they want is to be bought off next time."

"Isn't that rather sweeping?" Caspar asked with non-committal mildness.

"It's the truth. Our politics are rotten clear through, and the high muckamucks are no better than the little boodlers. Why, look here! I can tell you something that all Wall Street is on to, but that you'll never see in the papers. Do you know why the President suddenly dropped his opposition to —"

"He happens to be a good friend of mine, the President," Caspar interrupted. "I saw something of him in Cuba when I was down there as a medical volunteer. I have a great admiration for him."

"H'm. Well, I wasn't going to say anything against him, except that, like all the rest of us, he's got his price." Mr. Burnett had a short laugh for human fallibility. "I never found a man yet that hadn't, if you went at him right. The muck-rakers and reformers put up a lot of high-class talk, but you give one of them a sniff of what he wants most — greenbacks or glory or whatever it may be — Why, I could tell you a case —"

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The telephone interrupted. With a relieved, "Excuse me," Dr. Diman answered it, then came back hat in hand.

"I shall probably not see you again this afternoon," he said to Burnett, and shook hands; but for Cassandra he had neither word nor look as he went out.

"He seems a decent sort," Burnett admitted, moving to a chair nearer Cassandra's. "What in thunder are you doing here, anyway? Did you really mean what you said, that you are grubbing for your living?"

"I certainly did." Her eyes rested on him passively, neither inviting nor repelling.

"What do you do?" George Burnett was not one to hesitate over putting personal questions; he fired them unflinchingly, and Cassandra had learned that a point-blank refusal to answer was the only subtlety that could reach him on that head. But to-day she was prepared to answer even the most personal question of all.

"What do I do? Write letters, keep case-record books, look up references in the library, answer the telephone, receive patients —"

"Oh, Lord, stop!" He got up in exasperation. "You in penal servitude like that!" he muttered. She eyed him approvingly: righteous wrath became him, dominating for the moment

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the lower part of his face. "What does he give you?" he demanded, coming to a halt in front of her with the characteristic throwing back of his shoulders and sidewise jerk of his neck — "As if his clothes were not comfortable," she reflected.

"Thirty dollars a month and my board."

"Oh, great Scott!" He went off into another tirade while she listened passively and wished it were over with. Presently he drew up a chair close beside her.

"Well, you let me come, anyway," he said, watching her narrowly. A defensive impulse made her protest.

"I did not happen to see your card until last night. I had no idea until then that you were coming."

"You could have telegraphed."

"Yes, so I could." After all, why should she defend herself now? She had told Caspar her intention, and he had not lifted his finger to hold her back. He had his Ann Blossom.

"And you didn't," Burnett insisted.

"No, I didn't," she admitted gravely.

"Well, you know why I'm here;" and one of his hands closed down with practised caution over hers, lying helplessly on the arm of her chair. It neither responded nor drew away. "I'm wild

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about you. You can do anything you like with me — turn me around your little finger.” There was a tremor of genuine feeling in his voice. “My wife’s going to have everything she wants — house on the Avenue, horses, tiaras, everything. I’m lavish — it’s my way. Plenty of self-made men, they hold on to their funds like grim death, by George, once they’ve got ’em. But I’m not that sort. If you wanted to travel, you’d just have to say the word and tell your maid to pack up. Now, honest, wouldn’t you like all that?”

She was looking at him, not unkindly, but from such a long distance that his confident voice dropped a little; his bold blue eyes fell to the hand that still covered hers on the chair arm.

“I don’t set up for a model of behaviour and all that,” he went on, evidently puzzled by her attitude. “I haven’t been any worse than other rich men, I guess; but if you married me — well, you wouldn’t have anything to complain of. I can promise you that. I —”

She drew her hand away. “I will marry you,” she interrupted. He was startled, for the moment more bewildered than joyful.

“You — mean it?”

She folded her arms across her chest, her gaze fixed on the slim point of her shoe.

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"I don't care for you, you know;" she spoke slowly and distinctly, as though to a foreigner. "But it is no doubt as you say — one has one's price. And I don't seem to have any other way out. If, knowing this, you still want me —" She lifted her eyes to his, and was surprised to find pain in them. But he answered as she had expected.

"I guess I want you any way I can get you!" He bent towards her, but her folded arms inexplicably kept him back. "You really mean it? You will do it?"

"Yes."

"Well, then!" He kissed her almost timidly and returned at once to his seat. "You'll like me all right when you're used to it," he asserted, confidence returning with the swelling realization of success. "I'm a good-natured fellow, you know; and I'll be awful proud of you, Cassie. Of course, I know I've got my roughnesses — I haven't been what you might call parlour-bred; but I belong to two swell clubs, and they know me at Sherry's and Rector's and all those places — you ought to see 'em jump when I come in. And I've made every cent of my money myself. 'Tisn't such a bad record for a fellow who started in at twelve without a bean or a whole pair of pants, now, is it?" He bent

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towards her again, taking both her hands as they lay passively in her lap. She smiled faintly.

"I don't believe, you know, that I shall be much comfort to you," she said. "I am spoiled, and not at all good-natured. If you were wise, you would run away."

"I guess not!" He crushed her hands together with a force that brought a pang of fear. She had never questioned her power to dominate him, to keep him just where she chose to have him: through all their acquaintance he had been like a clumsy tame bear, eager to obey her little rod. What if he lost his fear of her? The fright passed, but it had shaken the apathy that had made this hour so drearily easy. Premonition of suffering to come drove her impatiently from her chair. He sat looking after her with a satisfaction that was still reassuringly humble.

"When will you do it, Cassie?" he asked.

"Oh, any time." She was considering whether it was worth while to forbid the shortening of her name, but decided with a shrug that it was not.

"You mean — soon?"

"To-morrow, if you like."

"You're joking!" But he had risen to his feet, overwhelmingly tall. She turned to the stairs, not pausing to look back until she was several feet above him.

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"Come with your motor at four to-morrow and you can take me away with you," she said. "There is a minister of some sort in the next street; he will do well enough."

"Cassie!" He sprang towards her, his face flaming, but she checked him with a lifted hand. The little rod was still all powerful.

"No; no more to-day."

"Oh, just one! That ain't fair, Cassie! Oh, say!"

She smiled, a hard little smile, and shook her head. "Good-by. To-morrow at four," she said over her shoulder as she went composedly to her room. He called imploringly after her, but did not dare to follow by so much as one step. Hope that she would relent kept him staring up at her door for a long time; but intense silence had settled over the house. Slowly and reluctantly he turned to go. Even with the front door open, he paused to look back and listen.

Ronsard, meanwhile, had been disturbed by lack of various dishes and implements which Ann, in her heedless table clearing, had left marooned on a side table. The sound of a strange voice had kept him from intruding; now that it had ceased, he ventured to come, with the cautious, sidling tiptoe of one in fear of a lady's

train just ahead, to the open door of the great hall and peer in, a bow of apology tremulously ready. Burnett had just paused on the threshold for a last look back; the light falling on his upturned face brought out sharply the remains of good looks above the straight sweep of his heavy moustache; his hard blue eyes were for the moment almost boyish.

Ronsard stood unseen and motionless, one hand blindly extended, a look of terror on his gaunt face. When Burnett closed the door behind him, he stole swiftly to a window and watched him mount his car and ride away. The bony fingers clutching the old man's jaw shook; his dim eyes had shown a flicker of his ancient Gallic fire, but it burned away into helpless distress.

"Émilié, Émilié," he whispered brokenly, and groped his way back as though the room had suddenly darkened.

As soon as the motor had disappeared, Cassandra set out feverishly for a walk, trying to deaden with weariness faculties that were showing terrifying signs of waking up. It was late when she came back, but all her miles of tramping had not done for her what was wrought by the sight of Caspar and Ann walking together in the garden.

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"After all, what else is there?" she asked with a sudden return to apathy as she entered the great hall and dropped down into the nearest chair.

"If I might speak to mademoiselle?" Ronsard, who had evidently been watching for her, was hovering in the doorway, one hand bent nervously over the other, his white head deferentially dropped.

"Come in, Ronsard;" her rapid voice always took on a shade of warmth in speaking to the chef. He stood hesitating before her.

"I am an old man," he began tremulously. "Mademoiselle will forgive if I take a liberty. The visitor that came to-day—I chanced to see him."

"Well?"

"I have seen that gentleman before, years ago. I am only the chef, I have no right to speak;" his distressed eyes mutely begged her pardon; "but mademoiselle has no one to warn her, and—" his voice broke and he wrung his hands. "Ah, what can I do?" he muttered.

"You mean that you know something about Mr. Burnett?" The warmth had left her voice, but it was not unfriendly. He caught eagerly at her help.

"Ah, my God, yes! There are things that

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may not be told to a young lady; but if I might be permitted to speak a warning, I who know—”

She rose. “I think I understand, Ronsard, and I appreciate it. I really believe, you know, that you are fond of me.” She let her hand touch his sleeve, then turned to go. “But I can’t let you talk about Mr. Burnett.”

He took an eager step after her. “I will say nothing. But there are dangers—mademoiselle will at least not go out with him?” She smiled.

“Mademoiselle is — going out with him tomorrow afternoon,” she answered.

“Ah, no!” His lifted hands were eloquent of despair. “Mademoiselle has no knowledge —”

“That will do, Ronsard.” And Cassandra went away, leaving the old man stricken helplessly dumb in the attitude of imploring speech.

X

THE evening dragged past, the next day's work began, and still Cassandra had not told Dr. Diman. Neither by word nor look had he so much as implied a question since Burnett left. She had warned him that she would accept the man, but he could have no suspicion that this was to be her wedding day; and she could not tell him.

Towards noon Miss Snell, shattered and tremulous, crept down the stairs on Ann's arm. She had been told the truth about the flowers and their ardent message, but no one seemed to connect the incident with her break-down, a saving of her pride that did much towards setting her on her feet again. Dr. Diman had also let fall, in quite another connection, that the librarian in the Sciences and Religions room was named Haines, not Barnes.

"I ran across him the other day, and knew it the minute I saw him," he added. He had guessed that Miss Snell connected the bald-headed, shuffling little man with the mysterious offering, but the idea did not amuse him; it only made his eyes warmly sorry.

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The knowledge that she had been unjust drove the invalid to a pinched, unwilling, "Good morning, Miss Joyce." Cassandra responded readily. The days when it was worth while to fight with Miss Snell seemed very remote. She even picked up a cushion that slipped from under Ann's elbow and followed with it to the garden, having an unacknowledged longing that her last day might not seem ill-spent in her employer's eyes. The knowledge that she was going back to ease and splendour was but dust and ashes to her spirit. Her way of life had bred in her no general, theoretic condemnation of loveless marriage: she did not despise herself for the course she was taking — indeed, it seemed to her traditions dreadfully right. Yet shame, a new and intolerable anguish, was sweeping about her like a prairie fire. The hours of the day were mill-stones grinding her heart between them.

She had finished her packing in the night, so after lunch she could go quietly on with her work. Caspar's eyes searched her colourless face more than once, but her dogged industry seemed an intentional barrier between them, and he went out without speaking. She managed to move so that she could look after him from the window. She might never see him again.

It was a grey, wind-swept afternoon, chilly

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and cheerless. Dust was whirling in from the street, and the weather-vanes pointed to coming rain. Hattie, laden with pail and cloths, paused by Cassandra's chair to look out.

"Nice day for washin' the windows," she observed. Voluntary speech from her was so unusual that Cassandra felt constrained to answer.

"Why don't you put it off?" she suggested.

"Take too much jaw," was the concise answer. "She's set on having 'em done to-day. Have to do 'em over again to-morrow, that's all." Thumping down her pail, she fell to work. "I told that Frenchman he'd have to answer the door," she added. "I can't do everything at once."

The wind from the opened window blew unpleasantly on Cassandra, and she had risen to find another seat when the sound of a motor brought her to a terrified pause. It was not at the front gate, but was coming in by the carriage drive at the side to the verandah steps. Patients often arrived in motors, and Burnett was not due for two hours; yet fright ran away with her. She found herself up in her own room before she realized that she had fled.

Ronsard, fumbling with haste, opened the glass doors to a professional-looking young man in leather and bowed him into the room with a deference that drew a silent snort from Hattie.

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The man produced a package and a letter for Miss Joyce, and explained that he was to get an answer.

"But most certainly — assuredly! If monsieur will sit down, I will attend to it at once!" Ronsard was quite breathless with obligingness when he opened Cassandra's door.

She saw the writing on the letter and her hand shook as she took it.

"Is Mr. Burnett himself down there?" she asked sharply.

Until she spoke, Ronsard's blurred memory had forgotten the day before. Now it all came back to him, and a look of haggard distress deepened his eyes.

"No; it is a young man," he stammered. "No doubt, his chauffeur —"

She nodded in obvious relief and broke open the letter, but he still hovered unhappily before her.

"Perhaps he is not coming to take mademoiselle out to-day?" he ventured very softly.

"I fear he is," she returned with a brief smile. "You may come back in ten minutes for my answer."

He retreated as far as the door, then halted in desperation.

"Mademoiselle will never forgive me; but has

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she spoken with the docteur about — about this going out —” He was nerved for annihilation, but she answered with unexpected patience.

“Not yet.”

“Ah, then — but she will talk to him first?” He took a pleading step towards her. “But that one thing —?”

“I shall be gone before he gets back, Ronsard. He won’t be home till after four to-day.”

“But Mr. Burnett may be delayed;” he spoke eagerly. “These machines — they are always delayed! He must take it on the ferry, where, look, there are nails, there are twenty ways of injury to the tyre, to the machinery!” The old man was tremulous with the excitement of his appeal. “So he must stop to mend it — is it not so? And then, with the docteur at home — ah, mademoiselle will consult him, just to quiet the heart of old Ronsard? The docteur knows the world; he can do anything.”

“Yes; if he is home before I go, I will — tell him;” she made the promise more to herself than to him, and gave him little thought as he hurried off.

More than ten minutes were spent on the answer to Burnett’s note.

“DEAREST CASSIE,” he had written. “I am sending you a wedding present. It was the best thing they had in Tiffany’s,

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but it isn't half good enough. Send me a line to say you haven't forgotten four o'clock this afternoon.

"Yours always,

"G. B."

Before her, in its case, lay a blazing diamond necklace. She glanced absently at it once or twice, then, with a frown, closed the case and pushed it away. "I am expecting you at four," was finally all that she wrote. As Ronsard did not come back, she took it down herself. Below, the chauffeur was chaffing Hattie, who, rubbing stolidly at a window, was giving back an occasional sledge-hammer of speech without troubling to turn her head. Returning to his car, he found the old Frenchman hovering about it. His eyes had an excited glitter, but he bowed with wonderful suavity.

"Monsieur has a very fine machine here. I take the liberty to admire it," he announced.

"Good car," the other assented, swinging into his seat. Then, noticing that the chef's coat and cap had been replaced by outdoor garments, he made a patronizing offer of a lift.

"If monsieur is passing the station —? I am a moment late." At a nod of assent, Ronsard mounted with the agility of younger days. The usual haziness of his sunken eyes was swept away by some burning purpose.

An hour later Cassandra set her desk in order

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and went up to her room to put the last things into trunk and bag. Her mood made her choose her plainest suit and an unadorned linen shirt. She looked no less handsome than usual, but a little more formidable, as she pinned her veil and pulled on her gloves. Her final glance in the mirror was as straight as the line of her lips.

As the clock struck four, there was a light knock. She stood motionless until it was repeated, a little louder, then she composedly crossed the room and opened the door. The firm "I will be right down," stopped at her lips when she saw Dr. Diman in place of the expected Hattie.

"Oh, Miss Joyce, can you come and —" He got so far before he realized her street attire; then his glance passed her to a strapped trunk and a bag lying beside it. "You are — going away?" he asked, after a pause that set her heart beating heavily.

"Yes."

"With —?"

"Yes. I told him I would marry him to-day."

His face showed a curious change. Not a muscle flinched, the eyes were as gravely impersonal as ever; yet the colour slowly receded until a ghastly grey-white had replaced the usual ruddy brown. She had seen colour change often

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enough before, but never so inexorably, with such deadly composure. It made her feel a little sick — as though she had witnessed an appalling accident. She was too hard pressed, just then, keeping her own brave front to wonder why he should suffer.

“When do you expect him?” His voice was wholly controlled, and she strung herself to answer in the same key.

“Now — about four o’clock. I will send back for my trunks when I know my address.”

“Is there anything I can do for you?”

“No, thank you. I was planning to — write you a note. I am not so unappreciative as I — seem.”

“Yes — that is all right. I understand.” He held out his hand. “If you ever do need a friend —”

She clung to it rather than shook it. “What were you going to ask me to do?”

“Oh, nothing of any importance. Simply to read some proofs with me. They can —”

“I should like to do it. Motors are so often late, and I am all ready. Please let me.”

“If you are sure —”

“Please.”

She led the way down-stairs, drawing off her gloves and turning her veil back over her hat.

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Proofs for the new edition of his book on nervous diseases lay on the table. He drew up a chair for her and gave her a typewritten manuscript to read from, following with suspended pen down the printed slips. The sunny silence of the great house was unbroken; the clock ticked of peace and orderly leisure. Half an hour had slipped past when down the quiet street the horn of a motor sounded. Cassandra's voice faltered, then went on. The horn blew again, almost at the gate. Caspar lifted his head, but she kept her eyes on the page and ploughed steadily ahead. The horn sounded a third time, but more faintly. The car had whirled past.

"Would you mind repeating that last paragraph?" said Caspar.

Five came, and half past; then six.

"Your voice is tired. You must stop." His normal colour had returned long ago, yet he looked indefinably haggard. The past two hours had left their more legible mark on Cassandra; there were bluish shadows under her eyes. She faced the situation with her characteristic directness.

"I suppose the machine broke down; but it is odd that I don't get a message."

"There was no chance for misunderstanding about the time, or the day?"

"None, whatever."

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"Ah, well, there will be some perfectly simple explanation." The reassuring intention of his voice brought a dry smile.

"I am not afraid that he has changed his mind! No such —" she stopped abruptly. "I might as well go and take my hat off, however. You will probably have to keep me for dinner."

"Well, I must say! If it isn't too exactly like—!" Miss Myrtle's harassed voice preceded her as she came confusedly down with her usual air of pursuing an escaping soul. "Hattie has just this moment told me that Ronsard has disappeared. Dinner isn't touched, of course. He has been gone all the afternoon. I do think this expecting to get work done by lunatics and maniacs —" Her broken sentences trailed after her as she made for the kitchen, tugging ineffectually at the fastening of a stiff cuff.

"Poor old Myrtle!" said Caspar with a faint smile.

"Ah, poor old everybody!" Cassandra echoed passionately, and the straight line of her lips quivered. She went swiftly to her room.

Caspar, after looking in Ronsard's room and about the garden, strolled down to the gate. Stragglers from the last train were still passing, and presently he saw the old chef, coming vaguely, as though it was his feet and not his worn brain

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that remembered the way. He stared blankly at the doctor, his eyes so blind and distressed that Caspar feared the end of intelligence had come. Then his face lighted touchingly.

"Ah, monsieur is at home! Then all will be well," he said with weary relief.

"Where have you been? To town?"

"I think it was to the ferry." He put his hands to his head in a confused effort at memory. "I am an old man — I forget. It was necessary to wait and wait — and then I think I took a wrong train — there was something — but the docteur is at home," he added, going back to his simple relief.

"Perhaps you will remember after dinner."

The last word awoke him sharply to the present. "Ah, my God, the dinner!" He fled to the house, appearing breathless with apologies before Miss Myrtle could do more than poke distressfully at the fire and jerk open various drawers and cupboards; but his haste seemed wholly to have upset what little head the day had left him. Dinner was a strangely conglomerate meal; vegetable dishes, carefully heated and covered, were found to contain nothing whatever, salt and pepper were trebled in one place and omitted everywhere else, and the sauce for the pudding tried to take the place of the gravy, with indescribable results. Miss Myrtle almost cried.

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"Nobody knows what I go through," she lamented. "Though I am used to it, and can manage better than anyone else could," she added with a hasty glance at her brother.

"I am sure you do, Myrtle," he assented with unexpected cordiality as they rose from the table.

Ann Blossom, still resolutely cheerful, followed Miss Snell up-stairs with a book. Cassandra turned expectantly to the proofs; then saw that Caspar had his hat in his hand.

"Oh, you are not going out?" Her voice was more revealing than she knew. He looked at her with troubled eyes.

"I have a medical meeting."

"And you must go to it?"

"I am supposed to speak."

"Oh, I can't wait here alone! And I may never see you again. It is all so dreadful!" broke from her.

"You think — he is coming?"

"Of course he is coming! And to sit here waiting —" Her hands were pressed feverishly against her cheeks and she looked out from between them in open misery. "You must help me!"

Many women had cried "Help me!" to Caspar Diman, and found help, even when there was no

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help to be given, in the compassionate response of his whole being to the appeal. Yet not one of them had seen such an answer as Cassandra would have read in his face had her sight not been blurred by sudden tears. She fought her way back to self-control, conscious that he was telephoning to one and another, making arrangements for a substitute speaker. Ten minutes later he took the chair beside her and picked up the proofs.

"Skip the next four pages," he said. "They are coming out."

"You mean this about the case of Miss S?"

"Yes."

An unwelcome idea, suggested by a sentence of the text, made her ask sharply, "Why?"

"Because I shall have to wait a little longer to prove that I was right about that case. I know I am, but the facts just now don't warrant my saying so."

"It is Miss Snell," said Cassandra, "and I have spoiled it for you."

"Perhaps not. She had not been quite so well lately, anyway. I noticed it before this happened."

"That was probably because I quarrelled with her and teased her. I did, very often." Cassandra spoke baldly, as if it were all too remote

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to matter much. "I would try to make it up if I were not — going," she added.

She began to read at once, listening tensely for a sound in the street. She believed at first that she was impatient to have Burnett come and "get it over with;" but a sudden peal at the door-bell undeceived her. It was her first encounter with genuine panic terror; and it left her shaken beyond possibility of concealment. Caspar, when he turned from directing the stranger at the door, found the manuscript strewn the rug and Cassandra, white and shaking, clinging to the back of a chair. His own startled nerves found relief in anger.

"Cassandra, why do you do this thing?" he demanded hotly. It was the best possible tone to steady her; her spirit, momentarily crushed, rose to the encounter.

"What else can I do? I must leave here."

"Why?"

She could not tell him the main reason. "Because I fail, fail! I do only harm. Besides, you don't need me."

"What harm do you refer to?"

"Miss Snell. I have undone all your work with her. I didn't know what it all meant, your care for her, till now, reading this book. I have been an ignorant fool."

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"You had to learn, my poor child."

"You don't want me to stay — you know it." The impulse to test him rose overwhelmingly. "You have your Ann Blossom." She tried to say it lightly, but a quiver of resentment betrayed itself. He looked amazed.

"What on earth has Ann Blossom to do with you or your work? Besides, she will leave in the fall."

"You are not —" the impetuous question faltered.

"I am not —?" he insisted.

She knelt down to gather up the scattered pages. "Oh, nothing. But I happened to see her — in your arms — the other night, and I naturally —"

The charge did not seem to disturb him. "So she was, poor little soul! Can you see only one meaning to an act of affection between a man and a woman?" She would not answer or look up, so he sat down very close to where she knelt. "My dear girl, you can't marry this man!"

"But I said I would!"

"That is a pity, but it cannot be helped. If you had seen your face, you poor child." He took one of her cold hands and began to rub it between his.

"Perhaps he really isn't coming." She looked

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up, the colour and freshness marvellously restored to her face. "I ought to feel ashamed and disgraced, shouldn't I? But I am only so glad and relieved." She gave him her other hand, still half kneeling at his feet. "But what can I do if I stay? How can I really help you?"

"Really help me?" he repeated, with little attention to spare for the words: both were living wholly in the clasped hands which their eyes so persistently ignored.

"Yes. I don't want to be just a derelict. You say I have brains; why don't you make some real use of them?"

He forced his attention to the subject and meditated in smiling silence for a few moments. Then he pressed her hands together, laid them gently back in her lap, and went into his office, returning with two desk drawers and a cigar box in his hands. They were strewn with papers, but when these were lifted out, an amazing quantity of greenbacks, chiefly in crumpled wads, was uncovered.

"Look at them!" he exclaimed in humorous contempt. "Isn't that a way to do business? You have heard my sister say a great many times that I could be a rich man if I would take the trouble." He stood up, his hands rammed into his pockets. "Well, it is quite true. I forget

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to send out my bills or to collect them, and I can't seem to bother about investments. I have not cared before, but lately it has been growing on me that I want to be rich."

"Why?" she asked quickly.

"Because then I could reach more people, do more for them. I want to put a big ell on this house and make an informal sanitorium of it, so that I can have more of my patients under my daily care. I want some expensive equipment and a capable nurse at the head. Oh, I have any number of plans; but someone has got to be my business manager — I am simply incapable of finance. Why not you?"

She was looking up eagerly. "Do you really think I could?"

"I know it. Here is my bank book; deposit all that and get it balanced to-morrow. Then I will turn over to you my papers, if I can find 'em. There's an empty house or two you might look over; they could be rented if they were fixed up. And there is any quantity of money owing me. We will get at it in the morning, and then I never want to hear about it again. Find a legal or a business adviser, if you like, but don't expect any help from me."

"Oh, I think that will be simply splendid!" All the latent capability of her nature rose to the

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appeal. "And when you can afford the ell, I will have it built — I learned to bully architects when I was seventeen. And by and by we will build you a little house down in one corner of the garden, so that you can have your free time to yourself and write more books and get so rich and famous that —" She broke into a laugh, quite the youngest sound that he had ever heard from her. "Oh, I shall like this!" She fell to smoothing and counting the money, while Caspar made a rough sketch of his proposed sanitorium. Her interests in its details surprised him.

"You don't really care about my derelicts," he objected.

"No; but I like to have you cure them when other doctors can't," she said frankly. "I do respect your work, you know. And I want you to be so famous that they will come from all over the country to you. I like success!"

He laughed at her, but did not argue the point. "How much have I there — several hundred dollars?"

"Very nearly two thousand," was the severe answer. "I should say you did need a business manager!"

They had a very happy time over their plans. Burnett was forgotten; he evidently was not coming that night, and the morrow could take care of

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itself. Relief from suspense, and the conviction that, however little Caspar might care for her, he was not in love with Ann Blossom, set free in Cassandra a fiery exultation that dazzled the man, but presently troubled the doctor. He took papers and bills away from her and drew her to her feet.

"You must go to bed," he told her. "And I will give you some trional to take up with you in case you can't sleep."

"I don't want to sleep!"

"But I want you to;" an answer which Cassandra, the imperious, found inexpressibly dear and satisfying.

When she had gone, Caspar sat as he had so often sat, these past weeks, with head thrown back and eyes lifted towards the door of the southeast chamber. His face was dreamily inscrutable, but his intense bodily stillness did not suggest passivity; it was rather the stillness of one dazed by a vision.

The striking of a clock, an hour later, roused him. He looked about as though startled to find his surroundings unchanged, and pushed a hand up through his rough, heavy hair to waken himself more clearly to the present. A step on the gravel outside suggested Ernest, and he threw open the front door in hospitable welcome, but was confronted by a stranger, a little, grey,

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clerkly man with a manner of patient precision. He held a much-sealed package under one arm and read from the address of a letter:

"Miss Cassandra Joyce, care of Dr. C. Diman?"

"Yes, she is here, but she has gone to bed." Caspar motioned him in. "Can you leave it with me?"

The man regretted with dry courtesy that he must disturb the young lady. There was no answer, but he must execute his commission with her in person and receive her signature. Caspar heard her frightened start at his knock, and spoke reassuringly through the door, then went downstairs, leaving the messenger to transact his business. A few moments later the man passed out with body deferentially bent, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

It was a long time before Cassandra's door opened again, so long that Caspar had begun to wonder if his conviction that she would come to him were not a foolish delusion. She was still in the kimono that she had thrown about her, and above her slippers there was a gleam of bare ankles, but she was as unconscious of these as she was of the great brown braid that fell heavily across one shoulder. Her face was not exactly frightened, but something in it impelled him towards her with a half-suppressed,

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“My dear girl! — What is it?” he added.

The seals of the package she held were still unbroken, but she silently offered him the letter and dropped into a chair with averted face. For a moment his eyes could not leave her splendid youth; then he turned up the lamp and sat down on the far side of the table.

The letter was written in an odd, straggling fashion, the lines running at chance angles, but the words painstakingly legible:

DEAREST CASSIE, —

It's all up with me. Auto smash — you'll see it all O.K. in papers, except that tyre didn't burst — it was cut. Some devil must have carved it on the ferry boat. Neat job — held till we got under full speed. Not suffering to speak of, but they're going to take my leg off presently, and my heart has been rather bum of late years, so I guess — they think so, too.

Cassie, I don't want you to appear in my will — can't bear to have you mixed up with the various widows that will be hustling for crêpe when they see the morning papers. (All liars.) Besides, I've got a sister that would put up a fight, and you're too good to be mixed up in that; so I have signed some things over to you, and my sec. is raking together all the portable property he can lay hands on, to bring out to you to-night — don't mind him, he's a grey rat for secrecy. Could do better by you with more time, but it's a decent little fortune and will take you out of that House of Correction. Makes me boil now to think of you there. It was the real thing with me, Cassie, and losing you now is pretty awful. But I guess you'll be sort of relieved.

Good-by, my girl. God bless you.

G. B.

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Enclosed with the letter was a typewritten list of deeds and securities, the contents of the sealed package. Across the foot of this was written in a wooden, clerical hand: "Mr. Burnett passed away at 9.13 while under the influence of ether."

Caspar folded the papers, replaced them in the envelope, and rose. As she made no motion to take it from him, he laid it on her knee.

"Well, now you are free to go back to your own world," he said in a tone of bald commonplace. Her head seemed too heavy to lift; she did not look at him.

"Yes; now I am free to go back," she assented, dragging herself to her feet. At her door she paused, half turning, but Caspar had gone to lock up.

XI

ANN BLOSSOM slept very little that night. Her resolute cheerfulness always went out like a blown candle when she closed the door of her room, and every night it seemed to her that by no strength of will could she ever light it again. She had watched feverishly all day for Ernest's return, but he had not come or sent word — sent word to her, at least; that big, handsome, remorseless girl who had driven him away might have heard. Ann writhed with anger at the thought, yet it was a helpless anger, such as a heathen might have felt against heathen gods. Cassandra stood for a power that must inevitably brush aside any frail Ann Blossom.

Soon after dawn she dressed and went softly down-stairs, impatient for the relief of bodily movement. A radiant morning was waiting to pour in at doors and windows as she opened them, and a breath of hope seemed to follow the sunny tide.

"Things sometimes come right," she told herself with a sudden lifting of spirit as she went to find the flower scissors. An hour later she was

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humming to herself as she brought the vases out on the steps and sat down before them with her basket of hardy, sweet-smelling little roses.

"You are out early," said a voice from the gate. The face she lifted was uncontrollably glad.

"Oh, Ernest!" She started up, the roses tumbling about her; then she remembered, and effaced the moment with a cordial, "How very nice to see you back," and an outstretched hand.

"It is good to be here," he assented in the same key. He looked as thin and tired as she did herself when the glow of meeting had faded.

"Have you been off in the country?" she asked with polite interest.

"Yes; a long way." He dropped down at the other end of her step, his back against the pillar, looking at her, as he so often had, over his clasped knee. "How is the doctor?"

"Rather tired and rushed, dear soul. Miss Snell has been ill."

"Too bad," absently.

"I am afraid I have a blow for you," Ann went on brightly.

"Ah, I know you have," he muttered, wincing, but she did not hear.

"I have not been told it, but I think Miss Joyce is going away." It was spoken with

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decently regretful sympathy. "I happened to see that her trunks are all packed."

"Is that all the blow I'm to get?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"Well, you can tell me when you get ready. Do you know what I have been doing? — Investigating a chance to spend the rest of the summer in a boys' camp. A man I know runs it, and he is only too glad to have me come and help. Don't you think it is a good scheme?"

"You will go away — altogether?" Ann's pride, always of a flimsy order, collapsed without a struggle before the shock of the news. Her voice was despairing. He looked intently into her face.

"Ann, do you know why I went?" he demanded, leaning towards her. A motion of her bent head answered. "I thought I had suddenly seen the truth, and that I had been a blind ass not to see it before — that you cared for Dr. Diman."

"Cared for — *that* way?" Her amazement needed no further denial.

"But I saw you last Friday night, you and him —"

"Do you mean when I was crying?" she asked after a puzzled moment.

"Were you crying?" He brushed aside the

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flowers that lay between them. "I didn't know that."

"I love him — perhaps better than anyone on earth," she explained gravely; "but — but not — Oh, how could you think such a thing!"

"Well, it is because I couldn't quite go on thinking it that I came back. There were things, little things, that I couldn't forget or ignore — you are so true, Ann Blossom! So I had to come back for an explanation. Why were you crying?" he added suddenly. The colour swept up into her transparent face, and he laughed, putting his arm along the step behind her. "Ann Blossom, why did you cry?" he insisted.

She curled into the arm as inevitably as thirsty ground drinks up water. Her shining face was lifted for a breathless, "Oh, Ernest!" before it was hidden against his. "Things sometimes do come right," she marvelled in an inarticulate little murmur.

The scattered roses were drooping and the vases still stood in an empty row when Miss Myrtle's lamentations, preceding her hurrying skirts, drove the two on the step to guilty activity.

"What else can we expect, with a loony — and I having to go off just as — never mind the flowers now, Ann, there is no time to — Oh, how do you do, Mr. Cunningham? I am glad to

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see you back, but you won't get much breakfast. That Frenchman has gone raving crazy!"

"Oh, Miss Myrtle!" Ann looked frightened. "Where is he — what is he doing?"

"He's sitting like a log in the sun at the back door, and the fire not so much as started! Hattie came and told me — she couldn't do anything with him, and now Caspar is trying his hand. I must say when it comes to a crazy cook —! Ironing day, of course. And Aunt Jennie laid up with rheumatism and wanting me — she has just telephoned. I don't know what to do. Do you think you could set the table?"

"Why, of course!"

"Well, please don't forget the tile under the hot milk, this time; I haven't got that mark off the table yet." And Miss Myrtle hastened towards the kitchen, sweeping Ann along with her — a radiant, singing Ann. Caspar, hearing her a little later, paused at the dining-room door.

"Well, hello!" he commented. She flew to him.

"Oh, Dr. Diman, he's come back," she whispered. "And — and he wasn't even dazzled. It's all right, dearest!"

His smile was as warm-hearted as the arms he put about her. "Bless you, Ann!" he exclaimed. Then they both laughed at Miss Myrtle's abrupt halt and shocked countenance.

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"He is just wishing me joy, Miss Myrtle," Ann explained. "Won't you, too? It's Ernest!"

"Well, I'm sure I hope you will be very happy," Miss Myrtle admitted. She evidently tried to stop there, but her feelings were too much for her. "Though how you two will ever manage to run a house!" she burst forth.

Their laugh was echoed in the great hall. Cassandra, who had just greeted Ernest rather constrainedly, turned swiftly back to him with outstretched hand and face vividly lighted.

"So I was all wrong?" she said.

"All wrong," he repeated, his pleasant brown eyes gladly responsive.

Ronsard continued to sit peacefully in the sun. When questioned, he listened with strained attention, but clouded eyes, and answered with his pathetic deference:

"I am an old man — I forget." Miss Myrtle was in despair at leaving, and her brother showed a flattering reluctance to losing her.

"Come back the minute Aunt Jennie can spare you," he urged, and re-entered the house with the air of having shouldered a load. Cassandra had come down late, and they met as though there had been no last night. She was told of Ronsard's collapse.

"I am afraid I must have the old boy shut

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up," he added, "and I think if you were to reassure him in his own tongue, he might be less upset by the change. Would you mind trying?"

"But why can't he stay?" she urged. "If he seems peaceful and harmless. There is plenty of room."

He hesitated. "I don't want to worry you," he said finally. "He seems perfectly harmless, yet just now I found the carving knife, the little, sharp one, up in his room. That made me feel that he ought to be watched. I am not afraid of his hurting anyone but himself, of course," he added, for Cassandra was looking at him with startled eyes.

She turned away, stunned by a new suspicion. Ronsard's feverish desire to prevent her going out with Burnett had been forgotten, shrugged away with grim amusement for the suggestion that she was a *jeune fille*, to be guarded. Now his distress came vividly back, coupled with a sentence of Burnett's letter: "tyre didn't burst — some devil must have carved it on the ferry." Could the old chef have cared as much as that? His absence yesterday afternoon and this mental collapse fitted in as neatly with the idea as the borrowed knife. Then the far-off tragedy of his daughter Émilié's fate offered a link before which she shrank in quick repulsion.

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"If you are at all afraid —" Caspar was saying.

"I am not. He won't do anything," she interrupted. "Take the knife away and let him sit in the sun as long as he can, poor soul! He can't last long, can he?"

Caspar welcomed the suggestion. "No; he may go any day, and I shall be thankful not to disturb him if it is fair to the rest of you."

"I want to be very good to him," she said with unexpected vehemence.

Hattie took the chef's place; but one meal of her cooking was more than enough. For years she had seen Ronsard perform delicate miracles of broiling; yet, entrusted with lamb chops, her one idea was to fry them long and thoroughly and serve them well chilled. Miss Snell, finding a clinging milk-skin in her cocoa, left the table in shuddering horror, and, as Ann and Ernest had forgotten to come, Cassandra was left alone with the dismayed housekeeper.

"I suppose Ronsard has spoiled us," he admitted, after a conscientious attempt to eat some hopelessly sour stewed plums. "I don't see how we can stand many such meals."

"Why should we?" she returned. "I will go up to town this afternoon, if you like, and find us a good cook." The "us" sounded natural

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and unconscious, and her face was wholly composed under his keen glance. Before he could bring out the difficult question in words, she had started to her feet. "If I am quick, I can catch the one-forty," she added, and hurried away, leaving the question still suspended between them. She came back triumphantly at six o'clock with a Scotch-Irish treasure and an engagement present for Ann — a chain of amethysts that caused the girl to look troubled after her first wild enthusiasm.

"But — you shouldn't have," she faltered.

"But I should," returned Cassandra. "I have had — some money left me, and this is my first purchase. You won't enjoy it half as much as I did."

"Oh, *won't* I?" Ann kissed the shining chain and squeezed Cassandra's hand. "I am so glad for you. I hope it is enough to give you everything you want."

"Everything I want to buy," she assented.

"That is lovely. Now I can be perfectly happy about my darling chain; it's just like liquid sunlight. And then, to have it from you! Isn't it wonderful, how things come right?"

"It really is," Cassandra laughed. She felt very kindly towards Ann Blossom.

After dinner, Dr. Diman went bravely out to

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interview the new cook. He came back looking uncomfortable.

"She is an excellent woman, excellent," he assured Cassandra.

"You didn't like her!"

"Oh, yes, I did; I respected her enormously. She was kind to me, but, somehow, she made me feel that my sole office was to pay the bills."

"But isn't that just what you want — freedom from interruption?"

"Of course. But how can I tell Myrtle I did the housekeeping if I don't dare go near the kitchen?"

Cassandra's laugh was wicked. "I don't believe that Miss Myrtle will go near the kitchen very much. Janet is, as you say, kind; but she is definite."

"Very definite. She intimated that she would see me for ten minutes every morning, and that I need give myself no further trouble."

"And yet you are not satisfied," she complained.

"Yes, I am. Only I feel mortified. I have a suspicion that I rather slunk out of the kitchen. Do you think, if I strode back and talked in a loud voice, it would wipe out the impression?"

"Never. Your only hope is to see her always on your territory; make her come to your office

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for orders. In the kitchen she will invariably have the upper hand."

"Oh, poor old Myrtle!" he exclaimed, and they laughed together. Then she grew suddenly grave.

"How heartless I am!" she said, seating herself on the ledge of an open window and turning her face towards the dusky garden. He took the adjoining ledge, as he had the day of her arrival, when he had caught his first glimpse of a helpless and homesick girl.

"Heartless?" The sympathy in his voice was impelling.

"The man I was going to marry has not been dead twenty-four hours, and I am gay — I am happier than I have ever been before in my life."

"You were not going to marry him!" he spoke vehemently. "You wrong yourself — no power on earth could have got you past that door."

"No; you have got to know me just as I am. I would have gone with him if he had come on time."

"Do you really mean that money could have made such a man tolerable to you?"

"No — I hated him. But I couldn't see anything else to do." She pressed her palms over her eyes. "Oh, it was horrible, horrible!"

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"I am glad it was," he said roughly, starting to his feet. "If I believed that you would really have gone —" She stopped him with imploring hands.

"Don't say it, don't say it! I had to go — I had lost all hope. But it was only a way of committing suicide. Can't you see it like that? Can't you forgive me?"

"Answer me one thing. Can you conceive that any crisis, any hopelessness, would bring you to such a marriage again?"

"Oh, no, no! Nothing! Oh, Caspar, nothing!"

He took her hands into his and kissed them.

"You would not have gone, my girl," he said. "You believe you would, but you would not."

"Oh, I wish that were true," she cried wretchedly. "Do you think I ought not to take his money?" she added. He started; for the moment he had forgotten her new position, and the memory raised a sudden barrier between them.

"Why not?" he returned dispassionately, after a blank pause. "If, as you insist, you would have gone with him, you have every right to it."

"And if I would not have?" she asked, hurt and chilled by the change in him.

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"That is rather a complex question. Why raise it? He wanted you to have it, and it gives you what you most want, — your freedom. I should take it and be happy." He left her to answer the telephone, and did not come back.

The days went by, and still Cassandra said nothing about going. She quietly took over the housekeeping, saw that Ronsard was comfortable in his gentle vacantness and that Miss Snell's wants were supplied, and brought a new sense of orderly ease into the establishment. Ann in her radiant happiness was of no slightest practical use, so Cassandra quietly provided a young girl assistant, and the household routine went forward with a silent smoothness that filled Caspar with amazement and gratitude. The troubled question never quite left his eyes, but she gave him no chance to ask it. She was very alert and satisfied these days, proud of her new-found capabilities, buoyed with a secret gladness that vibrated sometimes in her deep, rapid voice, or shone out thinly veiled as amusement in her straight glance. Caspar could make nothing of her, and lost weight visibly in the effort to wait in silent patience. All his serene faith in his own dominance over the course of events had been taken from him on the night when he and she had waited together for Burnett's coming — and forgotten

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him. Before that, he had seen clearly enough what the future might bring, had debated its consequences and been content to wait. Now he was sure of nothing but the overwhelming desire of his heart; cared for nothing but the hope that it might be satisfied.

She worked very hard. He had not given her the promised business papers, but she seemed to have found them for herself and to have taken hold of his affairs with a firm grasp. He protested at last.

"This won't do," he exclaimed when he had found her, one late afternoon, bending over some accounts with the flushed cheeks of weariness. "I can't have a young woman of wealth slaving over my puny rents and dividends."

She did not look up. "If you are paid thirty dollars a month, you have to earn a dollar a day," she reminded him, a mischievous twist of her lips belying her gravity.

"No doubt; but you need not earn three times that amount. Come and take a walk with me."

Her pen still travelled busily down the columns of figures. "If you are in the business world, the first law is that you deliver the goods," she murmured. He had to laugh.

"Don't! Did I really dare say all that to you?"

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“‘Dare’? How affected of you! Is there anything on earth that you wouldn’t dare say?”

“I assure you, my dear, there is;” with a meaningful emphasis that sent her eyes hastily back to the accounts. “Haven’t you seen me trying for a week?”

“A week isn’t very long.”

“Not to middle age, perhaps.” They laughed at the allusion. “I am young, Cassandra! Don’t you believe it now?”

The running sap seemed to start in the desk under her elbows and the floor beneath her feet. “Are you rash and selfish and unwise?” she insisted.

“Ah, I don’t want to be unwise for you! That is just the trouble.”

The pause that followed depressed and frightened her. She caught blindly at another topic.

“Miss Myrtle is coming back to-morrow,” she reminded him.

“But not as housekeeper. Never again!” he declared. “Though what we shall do when you —”

“You will hurt her feelings.”

“Why, hasn’t she been wailing for years —”

“She will be hurt, just the same. I will tell you — promote her to be keeper of the linen in the new sanitorium. That will give her just

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about trouble enough. Don't you think we can have it done by Christmas, if we go right to work?" She was drawing little plans on the back of an envelope with anxious pains.

"But am I in a position to undertake it?"

"Why, I will put it through for you." She tried desperately to say it casually. "As for the money, you know I have—" The sentence trailed off abstractedly, as she drew a staircase with minute care. He made no answer. "Unless — you have a feeling — against that money?" she added in a low voice.

"Why, I don't suppose I should care to profit by it personally," he admitted, his eyes on her bent head, "but as for the sanatorium — that is scarcely a money-making project. Abstractly speaking, I don't see why it should not accept any legitimate endowment."

"Then you will let me go ahead with it?" she asked eagerly.

He would have no more pretence. He took pencil and paper away from her.

"That is a wholly different matter. It would use up the greater part of your little fortune. Why should you do that?"

"Because I — I don't quite like that money."

"It means your freedom."

"No. It means that — I would have gone

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with him." A deep flush swept over her face. "I can't bear that thought — it scorches me!"

His hands closed over hers. "My dear, your own world, the world you missed so bitterly, is open to you now. Inevitably, you will want to go back to it."

"No." Her eyes looked straight into his at last.

"There is only one way you can stay, dearest."

"There is only one way I want to stay."

"You are sure, my girl — sure?"

She drew him closer. "Oh, Caspar, I have been sure for so long!"

Later, Ann and Ernest, walking together in the garden, passed beneath the window. A little rush of warm laughter from Ann brought a troubled frown to Cassandra's eyes.

"Ah, I am not sweet and kind, like that. I never shall be — you know it, don't you?"

"Yes, I know it," he said contentedly. "I don't quarrel with an eagle because it isn't a song bird, my girl."

"She would give you a great deal more sympathy about the individual patients," Cassandra went on with a surprising touch of wistful humility. "But, Caspar dear, she couldn't run things for you as I can — oh, you know that!" There were acutally tears in her eyes. A sudden memory of

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her as she sat in that very chair her first day, frankly impatient of him and all his works, made him laugh to himself and gather her breathlessly close.

“Oh, my Cassandra, how the mighty have fallen!” he murmured.

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